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A RESEARCH PROJECT BY DOUGLAS SHAW & ASSOCIATES

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# 2024 Donor Experience Scorecard

A view of how organizations communicate with donors after their first gift online and during the initial steps of their engagement with the nonprofit.





A man with a beard and short brown hair is looking down at a black smartphone in his right hand. He is wearing a light blue denim jacket over a grey t-shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

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## SECTION 1

# Overview

**Donors are the lifeblood of any nonprofit organization.** That's why it's important to spend some time each year focusing on how we as fundraisers can better support, thank, and grow relationships with these valued partners. No matter how amazing your nonprofit is at donor communication, there is always room to learn, grow, and improve—which is why we created the *Donor Experience Scorecard*.

**This research focuses on donor communication**—more specifically, a comprehensive review of how nonprofits are choosing to connect with new donors in their first few months on the donor file. This is a critical time in the donor journey because it's often when donors are “testing the waters” to learn more and make the decision to become long-term supporters of that organization. And **communication done well can reinforce the mission, inspire donors, and set the foundation for long-term partnership.**

But donor expectations are high. The advent of omnichannel communications brought about a shift in how nonprofit organizations interact with their donors. This happened first in the for-profit world, with companies like Amazon creating seamless experiences and easy-to-use purchases. This shift helped create a world where donors have significantly higher expectations for the nonprofits they choose to support. They want to be known individually and communicate easily, whether they choose to connect with your organization through social channels, messaging apps, email, phone, or through the mail.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly digital world, our study investigates the extent to which nonprofits are harnessing the power of omnichannel communication to connect with donors. From traditional methods, such as direct mail and phone calls, to contemporary channels like social media, email campaigns, and interactive websites, we aim to analyze the effectiveness and integration of these diverse communication channels.



By examining the practices of 75 nonprofit organizations, we seek to identify trends, challenges, and success stories in omnichannel donor communications. We hope these findings will provide valuable lessons that can guide nonprofits in fostering meaningful connections with their donors, and ultimately contribute to an even greater impact in being a part of what is right with the world.

## SECTION 2

# About the Study

Donors have diversified their communication preferences. Some may prefer traditional avenues like direct mail or phone calls, while others engage more readily through social media, email, or websites. To navigate this diversity, nonprofits must adopt an omnichannel approach that not only accommodates varied donor preferences, but also ensures a cohesive and integrated communication experience wherever the donors choose to communicate.



**Omnichannel fundraising** refers to communicating with donors across multiple channels and touchpoints—including email, direct mail, social media, phone calls, text messages, broadcast, and many more.

There is a technical element to omnichannel fundraising, which focuses on how systems integrate with one another, what messages are sent to your audiences, and when those messages are deployed. Getting a handle on the technical elements certainly helps simplify communications—but *the true goal is serving your donors well.*

By doing so, your organization is likely to stay top of mind and in donors' hearts because your consistent communication makes them feel supported, connected, and inspired. And done well, it can help donors become partners in your mission, not merely a wallet your organization regularly pulls from.

Every year, new channels of communication emerge, which require nonprofits to continually adapt what they're doing and how they're supporting their donors. It is with this in mind that Douglas Shaw & Associates created the *2024 Donor Experience Scorecard*.

For this research, we studied the communications of 75 different nonprofit organizations in the months of November and December 2023. We made donations at the end of October, then recorded and monitored all communications that came in during the following months—specifically observing the channel, timing, message, and topic of communication. These interactions were then compared against best practices, what we have observed with our own clients, and what we saw in our previous research. The goal was to help outline what organizations are doing well, and determine some key areas for improvement to leverage for the coming year.



**This research provided Douglas Shaw & Associates with an understanding of how a select group of nonprofit organizations interact with their new donors after their initial gifts. Observations from this project will allow organizations to consider their communication efforts and better optimize their processes, with the goal of strengthening donor engagement and improving fundraising results.**



## SECTION 3

# Donor Journey: The Beginning

No matter how donors hear about your organization, before deciding to give, it's becoming a more frequent practice for them to look for information online first. Whether they look on your social channels, Google you, or find themselves on your website, the reality is that the online space is increasingly a key part of their decision-making process.

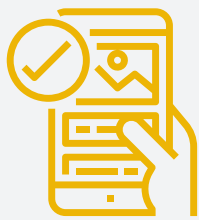
**A website acts as a central hub where potential donors can explore an organization's history, learn about ongoing projects, and understand the tangible outcomes of their potential contributions.** So it is here that the tone is set for the donor's journey. Thus, it should serve as a guide in answering critical donor questions like:

- Does this organization look like it knows what it's doing?
- Are there stories of impact or stats that prove my dollar will make a difference?
- Can I get my questions answered quickly and transparently?

Now more than ever, more donors are going to your website on a mobile device (57% according to the M+R Benchmark report). Therefore, responsive design, intuitive navigation, and engaging content that adapts to various screen sizes are essential elements for nonprofits aiming to capture and retain the attention of donors who are on the move. This is even more important for the donation process, where donor patience (already low on mobile devices) can be tested as they fill out forms and answer questions.



At the start of this communications research, we began with a look at nonprofit websites where last year, most organizations saw significant opportunities for improvement. We focused on four main areas: **website speed, domain consistency, payment options available, and value proposition.** These were focal points because the more organizations optimized in these areas, the more conversions they saw in viewers actually becoming new donors.



**Takeaway:** Ensuring a strong online presence, especially through mobile-friendly websites, is crucial for nonprofits to attract and retain donors. Key areas of focus include website speed, domain consistency, payment options, and conveying a clear value proposition to potential donors—and optimizing these aspects can significantly increase donor conversions.

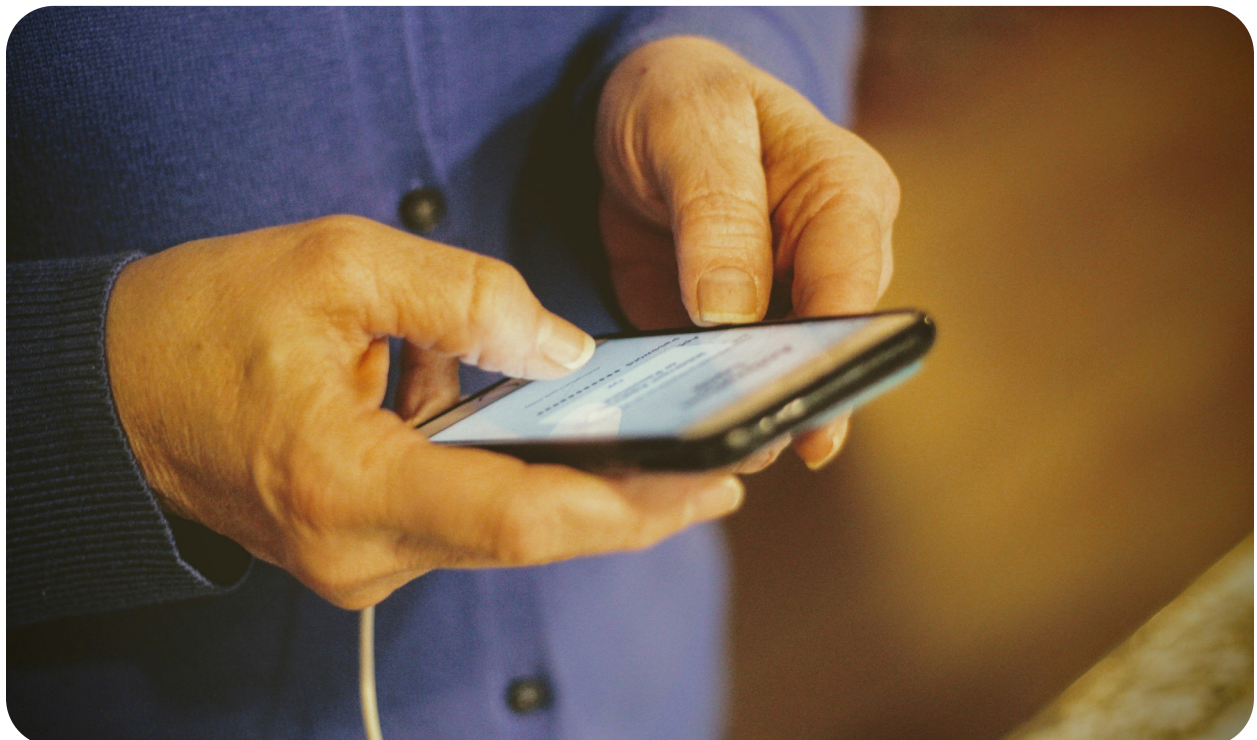


## Website Speed

**Website speed** is a metric that focuses on how long it takes a website to load pages and is calculated for both desktop computers and mobile devices.

There are many different ways to measure page speed on a website, however. For instance, how quickly is content visible on the page, when can the user start interacting with the page content, or how long does it take for the page to fully load?

This report uses a metric called “Largest Contentful Paint,” which starts measuring site speed as soon as the user initiates loading the page, and it finishes when the largest block within the viewable area has fully loaded. We selected this metric because donors often feel a page has loaded once a large area of their viewable screen has content. **Google recommends that websites have a large contentful paint of 2.5 seconds or less because generally, a one-second increase in loading time can result in as much as a 55% reduction in the conversion rate.\***



For the organizations surveyed in 2023, the websites had an average page speed on a desktop computer of 4.5 seconds, which is slightly slower than the 4.17 seconds we saw last year. The speed on mobile devices improved from last year, averaging 15.91 seconds in 2023 and 21.49 in 2022. However, both times still leave significant room for improvement when compared to Google’s recommended load time of 2.5 seconds.

### Mobile and Desktop Loading Speeds among Organizations

	Rescue Missions	Food Banks	Other
Mobile <2.5 seconds	3%	11%	7%
Mobile >2.5 seconds	97%	89%	93%
Desktop <2.5 seconds	62%	22%	71%
Desktop >2.5 seconds	38%	78%	29%

\***Conversion rate** is the rate of completion of a financial transaction on a website.



## 2.5 seconds...

Google’s max recommended loading time for webpages—because even a one-second increase in loading time can lead donors (as much as 55%) to leave the page.

# Domain Consistency

Maintaining consistency in the domain between a nonprofit’s main website and its donation form is crucial to instilling trust and credibility in donors. When users navigate from the main website to the donation form, seeing the same domain reassures them that they are still within the nonprofit’s secure and official environment. A different domain might raise suspicions about the legitimacy of the donation process, potentially leading to a loss of trust.

To maintain a high degree of trust in your organization, this can be done in two ways: you can either keep the entire domain or have your donation form on a subdomain. Both options reaffirm for your donors that you are who you say you are. But changing to a different domain can introduce friction—interrupters that push against the donor completing the donation process.

Differences in the types of domains	Same domain → <a href="#">www.orgname.org</a> ✓
	Subdomain → <a href="#">donate.orgname.org</a> ✓
	Different domain → <a href="#">secure2.convio.net</a> ✗

## Domain Consistency Among Organizations

	Rescue Missions	Food Banks	Other
Same Domain	56%	52%	57%
Subdomain	32%	44%	36%
Different Domain	12%	4%	7%



## Consistency is key!

Donors want to know you are who you say you are and that their money is going to the right organization. You can reassure them with consistency across your domains.

## Payment Options

As mentioned earlier, mobile device traffic is growing! However, many nonprofits still see the largest percentage of their donations happening via desktop transactions. One reason for this is that it's significantly harder and more time-consuming to fill out long forms on a mobile device. Mobile users also tend to have more distractions and notifications that could pull them away from completing a donation. **So as mobile traffic continues to grow, offering quick and easy ways for individuals to give in just a few short clicks is essential.**

One of the best ways to simplify giving is to offer multiple payment processing methods. Apple Pay, Google Wallet, PayPal, and Venmo often streamline the donation process to *seconds* rather than *minutes*. Because donors use different payment methods, nonprofits need to provide multiple options to accommodate their preferences. By doing so, nonprofits ensure they are inclusive and accessible to a wider audience.

### Payment Processing Options

	Rescue Missions	Food Banks	Other	Total 2022	Total 2023
Venmo	26%	44%	14%	11%	31%
Paypal	56%	70%	50%	44%	60%
Apple Pay/Google Wallet	6%	22%	21%	16%	15%
Crypto	0%	7%	0%	4%	3%



Since last year, there's been a significant increase in organizations leveraging Venmo and PayPal as payment options for their donors. However, results show no meaningful change with Apple Pay, Google Wallet, or Crypto, which suggests there could be untapped revenue on the table for these organizations.



## Value Proposition

A good value proposition on a nonprofit donation form serves as a compelling and concise statement that communicates the unique benefits and impact donors can achieve by contributing to the organization. **A well-crafted value proposition inspires potential donors by clearly articulating the positive change or impact their contributions can make.** It aims to evoke emotions, aligning donors with the organization's mission and motivating them to be a part of something meaningful.

Value proposition also answers the question: *“What difference will my donation make?”* By providing specific examples or illustrating success stories, nonprofits can help donors understand the real-world change their support can bring to fruition.

Our previous study focused purely on if value proposition was present on a donation form—but realistically, there are different degrees of value proposition. Did an organization just restate its mission statement, or did it provide a compelling answer to why someone should give, and give now? So for this year's study, our responses are categorized differently to determine how well organizations are doing in providing value and giving potential donors a reason to give.

- Value proposition levels
- No reason to give provided
  - Minimal reason provided

**Example → Your Gift Will Transform Lives.**

This example provides a reason to give, but it's generic. Donors are left with more questions than answers: *Why should I give today instead of giving on another day? What specifically will my gift do to transform lives? Why should I give to your organization versus another one?*

Good value proposition

**Example → Right now, one person in five doesn't have enough to eat. Your tax-deductible gift helps provide food and hope to families, children, and seniors right here in our neighborhood. Together, we can help people in our community during their greatest time of need. Every \$10 you donate provides 50 meals!**

This example provides donors with far more comprehensive information. With this text, donors know what they're being asked to give, what their gifts will do, and why they need to give now.

**Donation Pages Including a Value Proposition**

	None	Minimal	High Quality
<b>Rescue Missions</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Food Banks</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>71%</b>

## SECTION 4

# Donor Journey: Initial Follow-Up

The period following a donor's initial contribution is a critical phase that begins to develop a lasting and meaningful relationship between the donor and the nonprofit organization. By promptly acknowledging and thanking donors for their support, nonprofits not only demonstrate appreciation but also lay the foundation for a positive and engaging relationship.

Implementing a welcome series in the first few weeks after an individual gives serves as an opportunity for nonprofits to express gratitude, provide essential information about their mission and impact, and foster a sense of connection with the donor. It is an intentional and tailored introduction that guides donors through the tangible outcomes made possible by their contributions.

In the first 90 days after a new donation, donors are often at their peak level of engagement and interest. Capitalizing on this window of heightened enthusiasm, nonprofits can also leverage their communications to help articulate the ongoing importance of their continued support. This can help transform a one-time transaction into the start of a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership, ensuring donors feel valued and connected throughout their journey of supporting the nonprofit's mission.

# Receipting

Providing a receipt in donor communication serves as an immediate acknowledgment of the donor's contribution, and when done well, it can also express gratitude for their support. This initial communication sets a positive tone and reinforces the nonprofit's appreciation for the donor's commitment to the cause.

It goes beyond a simple acknowledgment of a financial transaction, playing a key role in building trust, maintaining legal compliance, and creating a foundation for continued engagement and support.

A frequent question we hear at Douglas Shaw & Associates is about whether a printed receipt should be sent for online-only donors. Reasons vary when this question is raised, but it often boils down to limited time or funds. Based on what we've seen, the receipt, when done well, helps a new online donor turn into an ongoing donor. Additionally, if you enclose a response device with your receipt, it typically *more than* pays for itself in terms of the immediate mailing costs. So we highly recommend including this as part of your communications plan.

## Organizations Providing a Digital Receipt to Online Donors

	Rescue Missions	Food Banks	Other
Received an electronic receipt	68%	78%	93%

## Organizations Providing a Printed Receipt to Online Donors Year Over Year

	2022	2023
Rescue Missions	67%	59%
Food Banks	42%	15%
Other	88%	50%



# Thanking and Welcoming Your Donor

Properly thanking donors is paramount for a nonprofit organization, as it is the cornerstone for building and sustaining meaningful relationships.

**Donors are the lifeblood of any nonprofit**, and expressing genuine gratitude goes beyond a mere formality—it acknowledges their generosity, validates their impact, and reinforces their connection to the organization’s mission.



A thoughtful and personalized thank-you communicates to donors that their contributions are valued and recognized, creating a positive and lasting impression and encouraging continued support. Donors who feel appreciated and acknowledged are more likely to stay engaged, contribute repeatedly, and even become ambassadors for the organization, spreading the word about its initiatives.

## Organizations That Utilize a Digital Welcome Series

	Rescue Missions	Food Banks	Other
Received a welcome series online	38%	41%	36%

## Organizations Providing a Printed Receipt to Online Donors Year Over Year

	2022	2023
Rescue Missions	42%	12%
Food Banks	19%	0%
Other	38%	0%

## Days Between Asking for a Second Donation

	2022	2023
Rescue Missions	24.7	19.5
Food Banks	21.2	21
Other	34.4	24

We saw improvements made in this timeline with all organization types, shortening the time in the last year between when the initial online donation was made and when donors received the request for the second gift. However, we typically recommend this request be sent to donors within the first two weeks to help activate them at a higher rate.



**Takeaway:** Acknowledging and thanking donors promptly after their initial gift is crucial for nurturing a positive and lasting relationship. And a welcome series early on can enhance engagement and transform one-time donors into long-term partners.

# Donor Journey:

## Additional Communications Strategies

### Phone Communication

Leveraging text messages and phone calls has become an indispensable strategy for nonprofits aiming to establish and maintain meaningful connections with their donors.

**Text messages**, with their immediacy and directness, offer a powerful channel for quick updates, event invitations, and donation appeals. With a high open and response rate, text messages enable nonprofits to reach donors where they are, delivering concise and impactful messages that can cut through the digital noise. This real-time engagement is particularly effective for urgent calls to action, time-sensitive campaigns, or sharing compelling stories that prompt immediate responses.

#### Text Message Examples

*Hi, this is [name] at [organization]. Every \$1 you give now can go even further, but time is running out: [URL]*

*Happy New Year's Eve! It's [name] with [organization]. All across our community, people are constantly at risk of homelessness and hunger. Any donation by MIDNIGHT will have DOUBLE the impact to help keep families in their homes or rescue struggling neighbors from the streets. Give NOW to provide TWICE the amount of lifesaving care to men, women, and children in need. [URL]*

**Phone calls**, on the other hand, provide a more personal touch, allowing nonprofits to establish a direct and authentic connection with donors. Beyond conveying information, phone calls offer an opportunity for genuine conversation, enabling nonprofits to express gratitude, address concerns, and understand donor motivations on a deeper level. Personalized outreach through phone calls demonstrates a commitment to donor relationships, fostering trust and loyalty. Additionally, phone calls provide an avenue for donors to ask questions, seek clarification, and feel more connected to the organization’s mission and impact.

Furthermore, combining text messages and phone calls creates a multichannel approach that caters to diverse donor preferences. While some donors may prefer the immediacy of a text message, others may appreciate the personal touch of a phone call. By incorporating both communication methods, nonprofits maximize their reach and effectiveness, ensuring they engage donors in ways that resonate with their individual preferences. This holistic approach strengthens the overall donor experience, reinforcing the organization’s commitment to transparent and meaningful communication.

#### Organizations Communicating with Donors through Text Messages

	2022	2023
Rescue Missions	27%	12%
Food Banks	46%	4%
Other	40%	0%

#### Organizations Using the Phone for Voice-Based Calls (Whether a Pre-Recorded or Live Call)

	2022	2023
Rescue Missions	14%	9%
Food Banks	4%	0%
Other	13%	0%



Unlike the other categories, phone communications—via voice or text messages—have declined consistently over the last year across all networks. It's unclear whether this is a result of technical hurdles, a lack of time/capacity, or performance that caused these organizations to leave it in 2023.



However, we can attest that for our clients who are using both voice and text messages, the performance remains high, with most organizations seeing a similar revenue return to what they see in their email program—all without hurting donations through email. So text and voice are additional channels in which organizations can potentially leave revenue on the table.

Platform selection is certainly something to consider when investing in phone communications. Some platforms may present technical limitations or allowances, including the ability to send a donation form URL directly in a text message. But again, all platforms are not created equal. So even if your nonprofit had a poor past experience with texting, it's likely worth revisiting to see if another platform can work better for you so you can leverage this revenue-generating platform in future campaigns.



**Takeaway:** Text messages and phone calls are highly effective in helping nonprofits connect with and inspire donors. While texts offer immediacy and impact, phone calls provide a personal touch, fostering trust and loyalty. Combining both channels caters to diverse donor preferences, enhancing the overall donor experience and potentially increasing revenue.

# Reporting Impact

A nonprofit organization should regularly report on the impact of what donor gifts are accomplishing. This communication provides transparency and reinforces that the nonprofit genuinely used the donors' gifts in the way they wanted them used.

**Newsletters, annual reports, and impact reports are powerful tools for communication, engagement, and relationship building.** They provide a platform to share important updates, achievements, and milestones. They also give space for organizations to share compelling stories, success narratives, and create emotional connection.

Regular newsletters help nonprofits stay top of mind for their audience. By maintaining a consistent presence in supporters' mailboxes and inboxes, nonprofits increase the likelihood that their mission and activities will be remembered when donors are considering future contributions or other engagement.

## Organizations Sending a Newsletter, Annual Report, or Impact Report Message Online

	2022	2023
Rescue Missions	22%	32%
Food Banks	46%	30%
Other	40%	43%

## SECTION 6

# Findings

When we set out to create this study, our aim was to measure the impact of omnichannel communications on the value and longevity of donors contributing to meaningful causes. Starting at the beginning of the donor journey, we evaluated methods, messaging, and frequency of sends across multiple channels to see how donors responded to those touchpoints. Our hope was that this data would give insight into fundraising approaches that enhance the donor experience and help organizations build deep and lasting connections with their donors.

Our primary finding through this research supported a consistent pattern we've seen with our own clients: **long-term donor value is substantially higher in donors who are reached on, and engaging in, multiple channels with the organizations they choose to partner with.** In fact, for our clients, donor value is as much as 200% higher in omnichannel donors versus those who are connected via a single channel.

### Measuring the Impact of Omnichannel on Donor Value

Channel	Revenue per Donor
Online	\$296.82
Offline	\$386.54
Both	\$891.29

But after reviewing the data this year, results show that with new donors, most organizations are *not* leveraging omnichannel communications during the most critical time in the donor journey.

This year, only 49% of the organizations observed sent something through the mail to new online donors, and the majority of those communications were receipts. Only 5% had a print welcome series in place, and just 8% sent an appeal during the time observed. This is a decline from the prior year when 53% of organizations were sending communications for these donors through the mail and online.



Additionally, we found that only 9% of organizations used phone calls and texts during the observation period. This is far too low, as these channels are highly personal and very effective in helping organizations connect with their donors. **Texts in particular have a 98% open rate—the highest open rate of any communication method currently used to reach donors.** From a fundraising perspective, most organizations we work with generally raise the same amount of money

through their text campaigns as they do with emails—all without negatively impacting the results of the email campaign. So text messaging has the potential to be a profitable revenue source for most nonprofits.



The good news is that this year, we saw some significant communication and donor experience improvements on other digital platforms. For example, website speed—the first impression you may have with a donor—increased for most organizations, indicating that over the past year, they spent time investing in making their websites better for their users. In addition, mobile-friendly payment processors, particularly Venmo and PayPal, are being more widely used, which will have an impact on the number of mobile users who are able to quickly and easily get through the donation process.

In the wake of the pandemic, most organizations experienced new and varying obstacles in raising funds, which often led to cuts in their budget or capacity. Unfortunately, for many, that's resulted in fewer channels and touchpoints in their print communication. **However, now is the wrong time to pull back in print because by limiting your donors to a single channel, or by greatly reducing touchpoints, organizations run the great risk of leaving money on the table.**



How? It isn't just because people who receive mail automatically give more. The increase in donor value is a result of investments in the donor relationship. The additional messages across multiple channels help donors see “behind the scenes” so they feel more involved in the work you do. It reiterates the impact of their gifts, and it reinforces that you are, in fact, doing what you say you will do with their funds. So when the time comes for them to make giving decisions, your organization is top of mind and on their heart.

## SECTION 7

# Conclusion

Navigating the current landscape of fundraising has challenges. However, at Douglas Shaw & Associates, we embrace the belief that donors have a heart to contribute to positive change in the world. This is evident in their ongoing sacrificial giving—despite rising costs—as they commit to making a difference ... *alongside organizations like yours.*



Your organization has a compelling mission to address a crucial need in your community and in the broader global context. By effectively engaging with your donors across various channels and with various tools, you have the opportunity to cultivate relationships, showcase the impact of your work, and collaborate with donors to transform lives in unprecedented ways.

To achieve this, it's essential to craft a message that is uniquely yours. Share captivating photos, narrate stories of transformed lives, and remain agile in adapting to shifts in the fundraising landscape.

We trust you've found these insights helpful and that they will aid you in better connecting with donors who are passionate about supporting your mission.

As your organization seeks innovative ways to meet the needs of your community, Douglas Shaw & Associates is eager to help equip you to achieve your long-term financial goals. If you're searching for a fundraising partner who listens, collaborates with you on your journey, and, most importantly, delivers tangible results, reach out to us today at: **[douglasshaw.com/contact](https://douglasshaw.com/contact)**



If you would like to have your organization included in future research projects, please email us at: **[info@douglasshaw.com](mailto:info@douglasshaw.com)**

# About Us

Douglas Shaw & Associates is a team of dedicated direct response fundraising professionals who want to be a part of what's right with the world.

Serving nonprofits for nearly 30 years with robust data and analytics, compelling creative, disciplined execution, and an innovative team—we help identify, attract, and retain donors to support the important work you do, allowing you to fulfill your mission.

Through collaborative consulting, we craft a comprehensive strategic fundraising communication plan that focuses on inspiring donors to be a part of the good your organization is doing. Our omnichannel fundraising strategies are created and executed just for you, utilizing a custom mix of print, online, and media channels for donor acquisition, retention, and reactivation of your individual donors.

**If you are looking for a fundraising partner who listens, walks with you, and, delivers results, contact us today.**



[douglasshaw.com/contact](https://douglasshaw.com/contact)



[info@douglasshaw.com](mailto:info@douglasshaw.com)



630.562.1321