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# Fundraising Tips for *Small Nonprofits*



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# Introduction

One of the hardest things for small organizations to do is raise money! Hard is an understatement, right? Fundraising can feel exhausting. You wear so many hats that it's hard to find time to fundraise. When you do have the time, it can feel like you're spinning your wheels.

Often, fundraising is like chronic pain for small nonprofits. No matter how hard you try to fundraise, you never seem to get the results you want. It can weigh down the rest of your work and limit the impact of your organization.

These tips and tricks are designed to help you step away from the fundraising that is weighing you down and focus your limited time on the areas that are going to have the biggest impact for you and your organization.

Imagine trying to drive with the handbrake on - you can try to accelerate, but the speed doesn't match your effort. These tips are like releasing the handbrake - they will allow your fundraising efforts to accelerate with more speed and to reflect the time and energy you put into it.

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## 1 Stop trying to copy the big shops

Most people don't know what fundraising is, and often assume that the job of a professional fundraiser is to [host fundraising events](#) or [write grants](#). Most people are not professional fundraisers in small organizations, and what they think about fundraising is usually learned by looking at what the big organizations do publicly. They think galas, big advertising campaigns, door-to-door fundraising or heavily designed direct mail with little branded gifts.

But good fundraising, especially for small organizations, is often none of these things. It really doesn't look like what the big shops do. So first and foremost, stop trying to copy what you see large organizations do for fundraising.



**PRO TIP:** It's not about the shiny objects. Sure - it would be great to jump on every new trend or be at the forefront of innovation, but often the fundraising that works for small organizations is the steady and consistent kind, not necessarily what's hot and trendy.

## 2

## Start with stewardship

All small organizations want new donors and to grow their donor base, but they often over-emphasize bringing donors IN and forget to invest in encouraging them to STAY. This leads to a “revolving door” of donors and creates frustration and burnout for the organization and its staff.

**Did you know, it costs 2-3x more to recruit a new donor than retain an existing one?**

Instead, think about ways to engage your existing donors, communicating with them regularly and building those relationships. Only after you have a strong stewardship program should you invest in bringing in new donors.



**PRO TIP:** The best source of donations for your organization are your existing and past donors - don't forget about them in your quest to find new supporters.

## 3

## Individual giving is your foundation for unrestricted gifts

Often organizations focus on corporate or foundation giving (i.e. institutional donors) above individual giving. It makes sense - they see the opportunity for larger gifts and corporations and foundations seem to have lots of money, so shouldn't they be the ones to give it? But those donations are often heavily restricted and time limited, so if they stop giving, that could have a huge impact on the organization's revenues.

Think of individual donors as your organization's lifeblood - these are the donations that come in regularly in small amounts that are unrestricted and allow your organization to do its core work. It's definitely worth your focus!



## 4

# Small events over big ones

Big fundraising events are usually not the best strategy for small organizations, unless you have a dedicated team of volunteers to sell tickets and secure sponsorships. They also take a lot of time to organize, which most small organizations just don't have.

Instead, try focusing on small "friend raising" events where you can connect with 20 - 30 people and introduce them to your organization, with a strategy of asking them to donate either at or after the event. These events are more intimate so your team can have deeper conversations and connect better with attendees. They are also easier to host and plan, requiring little time or cost.

## 5

# Research your grants - and then connect

When it comes to grant writing - quality over quantity! Don't focus on getting out the most number of grants possible. Instead, do your research with a tool like [Grant Connect](#) to ensure you align a grantmaker's funding priorities with your organization's own priorities. But don't stop there! If you can reach out and make a connection with a funder before you submit your grant, you can start building a relationship and might be able to get extra information to submit a stronger application.



## Stewardship Checklist:

So you've won (or lost)  
your grant.

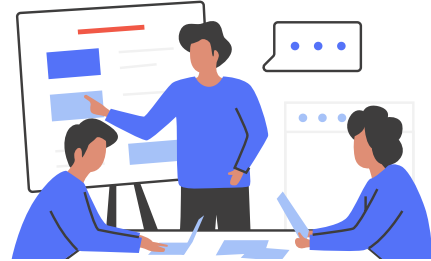
Now What?

[Download The Checklist](#)

## 6 Ask for feedback

If you don't receive a grant, ask for feedback. Often a grantor can make assumptions about an organization based on the contents of its funding proposal. Asking for feedback and connecting with a funder after receiving a "no," may, for example, cause them to re-evaluate an application and turn the "no" into a "yes"!

However, not all grantors will re-evaluate their decisions, but they might be able to give you insight to improve your application for the next round or even to stop wasting time applying if it's not actually the right fit.



## 7 Invest in technology

Many organizations spend hours doing tasks that can be done in seconds with a very small investment in technology. When you compare the cost of someone's time, it almost always pays off to have strategic technology investments for core functions like managing donors and donations, tax receipts, etc. Spreadsheets are never the best way to track donor data and lack the ability to provide you with insights and metrics around your fundraising. Many organizations use tools like [Keela](#) not just because of their functionality, but because they're also easy to use. Usability is critical when it comes to choosing your tech. If you aren't going to use it well, it doesn't matter how cheap it is - it will do nothing for you.

See how Keela can support your organization's fundraising efforts.

[Learn How it Works](#)



**PRO TIP:** Test drive your tech! Your organization's adoption of technology is directly tied to how easy it is to use, and that's not usually understood in a single demo. Ask for a dummy account or a free trial period to test technology before you commit.

## 8

## Know your audience

Fundraising should be aligned with your mission first and the audience who engages with it. Fundraisers often make fundraising decisions based on their own personal preferences, which don't always reflect their audience's interests and behaviors. Get to know your donors so you can understand why and how they give, and even start to have honest conversations with them about things like the [overhead myth](#) and the need for unrestricted funding.



Cindy Wagman

## About the Author

Cindy Wagman is the President and Founder of [The Good Partnership](#), a values-driven, social-justice informed consultancy that is working to unlock the potential of small nonprofits through fundraising. Cindy became a Certified Fundraising Executive in 2009 and received her MBA from the Rotman School at the University of Toronto in 2013. Cindy has presented for AFP (Association of Fundraising Professionals), CanadaHelps, CharityVillage, Bloomerang, Keela, and Fundraising Everywhere. She is the host of the top-rated [The Small Nonprofit podcast](#), and best-selling author of [Raise It! The Reluctant Fundraiser's Guide to Raising Money Without Selling Your Soul](#).