



# Ultimate Guide to Nonprofit Email Marketing

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Email isn't dead. In fact, email is still absolutely one of the best ways to [connect with your audience at a nonprofit](#). That's because it's personal, cost-effective, and more guaranteed than just about any other platform. But if you want to make nonprofit email marketing for you — how do you approach it?

That's exactly what we are answering in our latest ultimate guide. Read on, and you'll learn everything you need to know to make email marketing [the most powerful channel at your nonprofit](#).

Mindsets. Tools. Actions you can take now, and more long-term strategy — it's all here. Enjoy this guide, and be sure to bookmark it for later!

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## WHY NONPROFIT EMAIL MARKETING IS SO IMPORTANT

To understand why email marketing is essential for nonprofits, we need to look at the modern day marketing landscape.

**Social media** platforms come and go. Algorithms change. Sometimes [your organic reach](#) with content takes a hit, and results with ads can be inconsistent. The one thing that doesn't change? Email.

People are still checking their email inboxes. Most of us do it multiple times a day. This gives you a great chance to stay top-of-mind for the people that want to hear from you. Crucially, your email list is yours. It's a direct line with people who have said, "Yes, I want to read your message."

Email is also personal. It lands in inboxes, not feeds. Even though some of us get hundreds of emails a day (and you have to put in the work to get noticed), an inbox is still less overwhelming than a social media timeline. An email can be opened, read, forwarded, or responded to. In contrast to social media content, this makes email as close to "personal communication en masse" as you will ever get.

Lastly, email converts. The end goal of nonprofit email marketing doesn't matter. Whether you're raising funds, recruiting volunteers, or promoting an event, email consistently outperforms other channels on ROI.

And the numbers don't lie:

- The average [ROI for email marketing](#) is \$36 - \$42 for every \$1 spent
- [Open rates](#) for nonprofit emails often exceed 25%
- Email marketing allows for [storytelling](#), segmentation, and automation at scale

If you care about impact and results, email marketing should be a priority at your nonprofit. Interested in getting started or upgrading your system?

Read on...

## THE FOUNDATION OF GREAT NONPROFIT EMAIL MARKETING

Before we get into the more specific details of how you can make nonprofit email marketing work for you, we need to have a general framework to work from. Below you'll find that framework.

Treat these points as the "four mindsets" you need to have if you want to succeed with email. Are they strictly necessary? No — but the vast majority of nonprofits that are succeeding with email marketing have adopted them.

Here they are:

Know your audience.

Great email marketing is based on a deep understanding of the people you are writing to. This understanding allows you to write emails that appeal directly to your subscribers. What makes your subscribers tick? What keeps them up at night, and what are their most common problems? These are things you need to know.

There are two main parts to audience intelligence:

- Gathering it (sending out surveys, signup source, and [social listening](#))
- Using it ([segmenting your audience](#) by interest, engagement level, or giving history)

Make sure you do both.

Have a goal for every email.

Nonprofit email marketing can contribute to a number of important goals.

Are you trying to:

- Inform your audience about a cause that your nonprofit is involved in?
- Inspire these same people to volunteer at your organization?
- [Drive more donations](#) to a fundraiser you are currently running?
- [Thank past donors](#) for how much money they've given?

While these four goals are some of the most common with nonprofit email marketing, there are plenty of others. Our point? You need to be clear on what your main goals are.

Likely, different email campaigns and sequences will achieve different purposes. This will not only make it easier to plan out your actions, but also know if you are successful.

Use the power of automation.

The real benefit to email marketing is that it can work in the background 24/7. This is only possible, though, if you set it up right. This is where automation comes in handy.

Here are a few [sequences](#) you should be sure to set up:

- Welcome series: the email automation that people first see when they join your list
- Event reminders: emails that can set up ahead of time that push an important event
- Donation receipts: automated communication sent out to donors with their receipts

Automation ensures that the right person gets the right message at the right time. It also saves you a ton of time. What's not to like?

Be an organization that people want to hear from.

This last mindset affects everything you do in your email marketing. For-profit businesses have it a bit easier. Send them a product they love, or a discount for something they were planning on buying, and you can get away with subpar emails.

But nonprofits? It's [much more difficult](#) to get people to donate money than it is to buy something. The solution to this? Email marketing that's built on personality, trust, timeliness, and enjoyment (emails that people look forward to). This last one is absolutely essential.

Now that we've covered the essential mindsets for nonprofit email marketing, let's move on to the first part of your plan: building your list.

## HOW TO BUILD A GREAT EMAIL LIST FOR YOUR NONPROFIT

To take advantage of the power of email marketing, you first need to have a list. Below you'll find some tried-and-true techniques for building a large and healthy list.

Important note: these tips are applicable to all nonprofits. It doesn't matter if you're just getting started, or already have a sizable list.

### 1. Create content that people love.

In 2025 and beyond, [content marketing](#) is how people get to know your organization. In many ways, creating content is unavoidable. Want people to subscribe to your list? It starts with making content that they're actually interested in.

Be sure to look up best practices on creating nonprofit content. This ensures you create the kind of stuff that gets people to sign up for your list. This can be content on your website, but social media is worth considering. Just look at [Charity:Water](#). They're using different social platforms to post viral video content, and [the results speak for themselves](#).

### 2. Make it easy to subscribe.

Once you are creating solid content, you want to make sure that it's actually easy to sign up for your list. A lot of nonprofits go wrong here. They make potential subscribers jump through hoops to get on their list. To be effective, it should be as easy as possible.

Here are some options:

- Add sign-up forms to your homepage
- Distribute sign-up forms through each blog post
- Use pop-ups on your site to collect email addresses
- Give people the option to join your list from your donation page

These are all standard practices for building an email list. They will work for your organization as well.

### 3. Offer a lead magnet.

Give people [a reason to join your list](#). Do that and your signup rate skyrockets. With a nonprofit, the sort of lead magnet you give away should target the kind of person you want on your email list.

Do you want a list of volunteers? Of people that work at other nonprofits? Of decision makers at organizations that are likely to donate? This will impact the lead magnet you offer, so be sure to do your research about [the best options](#).

### 4. Send a great welcome series.

You don't get a second chance at a first impression. This is why your welcome sequence is so important.

When somebody first signs up to your list, they should get an automation of 5-7 emails. This will usually introduce your mission and tell your subscribers why they should care (be sure to deliver their lead magnet if they've signed up for one).

Keep in mind that you can (and probably should) have different welcome sequences. Change the messaging depending on where somebody came from.

### 5. Clean your list regularly.

It's a sad truth about nonprofit email marketing: a lot of the people that sign up for your list are ["low intent"](#) subscribers. This means their engagement with your emails drops off quite quickly. These aren't the kinds of subscribers you want.

This is why you need to clean your list. A couple times a year, prioritize removing inactive email addresses from your list. This will help with your deliverability and overall list health. Nobody likes doing this (especially since you work hard for each email subscriber). But it's something that needs to be done.

## 5 TIPS TO WRITING EMAILS THAT PEOPLE LIKE

### 1. Subject lines are everything.

How much time are you devoting to creating subject lines for your emails? Double it. Think about it: you could have the secret to life in one of your emails — if nobody is going to open it, it doesn't matter. And if nobody opens your emails? You won't achieve anything with your email marketing.

Here are a few tips:

- Try to create multiple subject lines for every email. Just brainstorming multiple options will spark ideas.
- Keep them short, clear, and curiosity-driven.
- Run [A/B tests](#) to see which ones perform best.

Do these things consistently for each email you send, and you already have the "80/20" of email subject lines.

### 2. Be personal.

Remember our tip about "being an organization that people want to hear from?" At a nonprofit, a bit of personality can go a long way. Many nonprofits are known for sending "lifeless" emails to their list. Or worse — hardly emailing them at all.

An easy solution to this is to make your emails more colorful. You get this by being more personal. Here are a few things you might consider:

- Share your mistakes and struggles
- Include pictures of what your team is doing
- Take advantage of the power of storytelling
- Share things that will make your subscriber laugh

Email marketing shouldn't be boring. Just because it's important for your organization doesn't mean

### 3. Pay attention to the user experience.

We like to think that if the content of an email is good enough, the [user experience](#) doesn't matter as much. But that's simply not true. Even if your email is incredible, a poor experience reading it is going to drive people away. Here are a few things you can do to prevent that:

- Avoid giant walls of text. Nobody wants to read an email made of huge paragraphs.
- Vary the length of your sentences. This will make your writing flow much more smoothly.
- Use bullet points. These make your emails easier to read and a nice way to break up paragraphs.
- Bold key lines. This is a great way to draw attention to key details.
- Make your email [easy to read on mobile](#). A large portion of your audience is likely reading on their phone, so be sure you make it easy for them.

Run through this list for each one of your emails, and they won't only be enjoyable to read. They'll be easy to read, too. That's half the battle for successful nonprofit email marketing.

### 4. Personalize when possible.

The more a subscriber feels like you are writing directly to them, the more effective your emails will be. This point is essential to understand. If you write to everybody, you really appeal to nobody. This is where personalization comes in.

Here are a few ways to make your emails more personal to the reader:

- Use the reader's name (which you can do with simple [merge tags](#))
- Reference past actions that your subscriber has taken
- Send emails that are based on their individual interests

These last ones are dependent on properly [segmenting your audience](#). Remember this: the more relevant an email is to a particular email subscriber, the more successful your emails will be.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT METRICS FOR NONPROFIT EMAIL MARKETING

Before we get into the metrics you should be following, one important note: always keep your main goal in mind. Are you trying to get signups for an event? Increase donations? Drive traffic to your new piece of content?

If your email accomplishes that goal, it's probably "good enough." Nonprofit email marketing is important. But there's no reason to become overly reliant on metrics that, compared to your main goal, just aren't that important. That said, there is always something you can improve.

Here are the email metrics you should probably be tracking:

- **Open Rate:** Tells you if your subject line is working
- **Clickthrough Rate (CTR):** Shows if your message was compelling or not
- **Unsubscribe Rate:** A small number is normal, but spikes every now and then can indicate problems
- **Conversion Rate:** The percentage of people who took your intended action (donated, signed up, etc.)
- **List Growth Rate:** Is your audience expanding or shrinking?

Focus on these metrics, and your nonprofit email marketing will be better because of it.

## BONUS TIPS FOR YOUR NONPROFIT EMAIL MARKETING

At this point you have a good understanding of nonprofit email marketing. You know why it's important and the mindsets you need to have to succeed. Before we move on to our section on tools, though, here are some general email marketing tips you should always keep in mind.

- **Send more often.** You're probably not emailing enough. And the results are clear: the more you email, [the more money you collect](#). One email per week is an absolute bare minimum. Start emailing more, and scale from there.
- **Opt for plain-text emails.** As we've repeated throughout this guide, successful nonprofit email marketing is easily checked for grammar, tone, and clarity, it's never been easier to create clear and professional emails. Your writing style is essential when emailing donors and volunteers — make it count.
- **Ask questions.** Invite replies whenever you get the chance. It not only gives you the chance to get to know your audience, but builds overall engagement as well. This tells inbox filters that [you're not spam](#).
- **End with a clear call-to-action.** You need to be clear about what you want your email subscribers to do. This should be clear, but it's one of the biggest problem areas in emails from nonprofits. Their mistake? Not being clear enough. Always be sure you have an obvious "next action."

Follow these last tips, and your email list will become more and more beneficial to your organization over time.

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

There are a lot of useful [tools for nonprofits](#) out there. Still, it can feel overwhelming to choose the right one.

Because we have already written about specific [email service providers](#), we wanted to provide you with some different possible resources. These will all improve your emails and supercharge your email marketing plan.

### Canva

While we recommend sticking with plain text emails, there is still a time and place for email design. This is where Canva comes in. If you want to make eye-catching banners, donation CTA's, or event visuals, Canva is the way to go.

### Grammarly

Don't consider yourself much of a writer? Grammarly can help. With tools that easily check for grammar, tone, and clarity, it's never been easier to create clear and professional emails. Your writing style is essential when emailing donors and volunteers — make it count.

### Litmus

Testing and checking your emails before you send them is essential. Too often, nonprofits send emails that are either broken or borderline unreadable. Do that, and none of your efforts mean much. With Litmus, you can ensure that your emails look great on every device before you hit send.

### AnswerThePublic

It can be difficult to come up with ideas for your emails. Often, this is the major blocker that nonprofits have in just getting started. With our last tool recommendation, that's no longer a problem. Have you ever wanted to know exactly what your supporters are searching for or have questions about? AnswerThePublic will show you.

## CONCLUSION

Nonprofit email marketing doesn't have to be complicated. At its heart, it's about building relationships, helping subscribers, and making it easy for them to take the actions that you want.

Start simple and show up consistently. Add a little bit of time, and your email list could very well become your most valuable asset at your nonprofit.

And if you ever need help with setting up your own email marketing system — just let us know!

*Are you an enterprise, nonprofit or small business looking for help on your website? Give us a shout!  
We provide a free consultation. Email us at [info@lughstudio.com](mailto:info@lughstudio.com) or call us at (718) 855-1919!*



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