THE 2026 NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS TRENDS REPORT

A coming-of-age moment in nonprofit communications

Sweet 16th Edition

NONPROFIT
MARKETING GUIDE

CONTENTS

Welcome to the 2026 Nonprofit Communications Trends Report, the "sweet" 16th annual edition presented by Nonprofit Marketing Guide, LLC

DEFINITIONS & DEMOGRAPHICS

To best understand the survey results, take note of how we use these terms and who participated in the 2026 Trends Report survey.

TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

More Effective Teams: Those who ranked themselves as Very or Extremely Effective. 43% of survey participants.

Less Effective Teams: Those who ranked themselves as Not at All, Slightly, or Somewhat Effective. 57% of survey participants.

TEAM ROLES & SIZES

Solo Communicator: The only person in a nonprofit responsible for marketing and communications. AKA one-person team. 28% (down from 38% of survey participants last year)

Small Teams: Communications team of 2-3 people. 35% of survey participants are small team leaders, and 11% are small team members. Together they represent 46% of survey participants.

Large Teams: Communications team of 4 or more people. 11% of survey participants are large team leaders, and 10% are large team members. Together they represent 21% of survey participants.

Together, solo communicators and small team leaders and members account for nearly three-quarters of survey participants.

TEAM MODELS

Centralized Team: Communications staff set the communications and marketing strategy and define their own workload with input from others. 36% of survey participants. 22% of Centralized Teams are solo communicators, 48% are small teams, and 30% are large teams.

Integrated Team: Communications staff and fundraising staff work on an Integrated Team and jointly decide on the communications workload. 22% of survey participants. 29% of Integrated Teams are solo communicators, 59% are small teams, and 12% are large teams.

Internal Agency: Communications staff are a tactical internal agency with its workload determined by other departments that need work done. 24% of survey participants (up from 17% last year). 22% of internal teams are solo communicators, 51% are small teams, and 27% are large teams.

CEO-Led: Communications staff work directly for the CEO or executive director who determines the workload. 13% of survey participants. 65% of CEO Led Teams are solo communicators, 32% are small teams, and 3% are large teams.

Fundraising-Led: Communications staff work primarily in service of fundraising leaders, who determine the workload. 5% of survey participants. 40% of Fundraising Led Teams are solo communicators, 47% are small teams, and 13% are large teams.

WHY 16 MATTERS

This is Nonprofit Marketing Guide's **16th annual Nonprofit Communications Trends Report.** It's a milestone that invites a moment of reflection and a bit of celebration, too.

Nonprofit communications, of course, did not begin in 2010 when we published the first Trends Report. Modern nonprofits and their predecessors have told their stories, mobilized supporters, and built public trust for centuries. But the world nonprofit communicators have been navigating since 2010 is quite different from what came before.

Rewind to 16 years ago . . . social media platforms were becoming central to public life. Digital publishing was no longer optional. Fundraising, advocacy, and communications were increasingly intertwined. Expectations around transparency, speed, and responsiveness rose quickly, and usually faster than nonprofits could adapt. NPMG began this research in 2010 because it was clear that something was changing.

Nonprofit communications began to look less like a to-do list that anyone on staff might handle and more like a profession: one with specialized roles, constantly evolving norms and best practices, and growing expectations for real results.

From the start, we designed this report not simply to track the use of tools and tactics, but to chart how the comms role was evolving — or growing up and maturing — inside nonprofits.

Today, sixteen years later, the data tells a clear story.

The skills are stronger. The expectations are higher. The stakes are real. And yet many of the systems surrounding nonprofit communicators — how their work is structured, managed, and evaluated — have lagged far behind.

At sixteen, you're quite capable. You're trusted with a lot of responsibility. But you're often stuck between two worlds, ready to try adulting but fighting against some rules and systems that hold you back. The gap between what you could do and the ability to bring it to fruition becomes hard to ignore.

The findings in this year's report reflect that same tension in nonprofit communications today. Our field has come of age in practice but is still catching up in how it is supported and governed.

Let's get a bit more specific. Three big reality checks from this year's data help explain why communications work feels the way it does right now, and why these patterns matter.

> "I've been working in nonprofit communications for more than a decade, and the biggest challenge hasn't changed much. We are still expected to be strategic, creative, and fast, but without the authority or space to actually do the work well."
> Small Team Leader

sweet 16 REALITY #1

Communications teams are capable, but lack real authority over priorities, boundaries, and the inevitable tradeoffs.

AT SIXTEEN, WE ARE EXPECTED TO DELIVER, BUT STILL UNDER CURFEW.

When communicators struggle, the data shows it's rarely because they don't know what to do. More often, it's because their work is shaped by external pressure, late involvement, and limited authority to set priorities or say no.

Communicators describe the need to be highly responsive while being whiplashed by competing requests and accommodating urgency (real or manufactured) as a default. The challenge isn't deciding what should happen; it's having the permission to slow things down, push back, or make intentional trade-offs.

This pattern is most evident in team structure. Communications teams defined by NPMG as Centralized or Integrated are more likely to describe their communications as effective than teams operating as Internal Agencies, even when those Internal Agency Teams are larger. Solo communicators face a related challenge: broad responsibility paired with limited capacity to set priorities or boundaries.

For example, 34% of survey participants say they don't use a project management system to manage communications requests. That jumps to 55% for solo communicators.

When individual requests come flying at you from every direction, it's much harder to set priorities, say no, or make tradeoffs visible.

What's notable in this year's data is what doesn't explain these differences. Mission area, organizational budget size, and recent team growth have little relationship to how effective nonprofit communicators feel. The common thread is not context or competence, but authority

In other words, many communications teams are doing grown-up work without being given grown-up control. This lack of authority makes it difficult to be proactive or intentional, regardless of the team's size or capabilities.

"We are often brought in after decisions have already been made and asked to "make it work." That limits our ability to be strategic, because we're reacting instead of helping shape the plan from the beginning." ~ Leader of a Small Centralized Team

"Everyone sees communications as important, but they also see it as something they can control or override. That makes it very difficult to set priorities or say no when everything is treated as urgent." ~ Solo Communicator acting as an Internal Agency

sweet 16 REALITY #2

What gets measured and how shapes which communications goals feel safe to pursue.

AT SIXTEEN, WE WANT TO STOP CARING ABOUT SUPERFICIAL THINGS, BUT WE AND THE PEOPLE AROUND US STILL CHECK THE LIKES.

The 2026 data also helps explain why some communications teams feel more effective than others, even when they are working under similar pressure. The difference is less about effort and more about which outcomes teams feel able to own and be evaluated on.

Teams that describe their communications as more effective tend to work toward objectives where success is clearer and more attributable. Think about fundraising: is the money in the bank or not? Or participation: How many people RSVPed and how many showed up? These teams are more likely to pursue coherent combinations of goals and to feel confident about what they are responsible for delivering.

Teams that report lower effectiveness show a different pattern. They are more likely to focus on objectives that are also important but harder to measure or attribute, such as awareness, knowledge, and influence. And they may be more likely to stop short of longer-term work because it's harder to prove what's working. This does not reflect a lack of ambition or a weak strategy. Instead, it reflects a rational response to working in a system where success is harder to define and failure is easier to assign.

One very clear example that we see yet again in the 2026 data: Half of survey participants say they never stop emailing unengaged subscribers. It's not because they don't understand the best practices for email list hygiene. It's a reminder that what gets rewarded is often what's easiest to count (a big list), not what's most meaningful to maintain (a healthy one).

In these conditions, playing it safe makes sense. When teams are judged on what's easiest to count, they avoid choices that might look like a setback in the short term — even if they'd improve results over time.

This insight does not suggest that some communications objectives matter more than others. Instead, it highlights how measurement and evaluation shape behavior, which we will explore more in the section on communications objectives.

"We're expected to build trust and understanding, but we're evaluated on things like clicks and opens because those are the numbers leadership understands." ~ Leader of a Small Centralized Team

sweet 16 REALITY #3

Communications is expected to deliver long-term impact, but is managed for short-term wins.

AT SIXTEEN, WE'RE ASKED TO PLAN OUR WHOLE FUTURE, BUT WE'RE STILL STUCK FINISHING TONIGHT'S HOMEWORK.

This year's data points to a persistent mismatch between what nonprofits expect communications staff to accomplish and how their work is managed day-to-day.

Communications teams are expected to contribute to long-term outcomes, such as trust, understanding, engagement, and influence — to change hearts and minds. At the same time, many describe working under constant urgency, short timelines, and pressure to produce immediate outputs.

When success is judged primarily by responsiveness and volume, it becomes harder to plan ahead, set boundaries, or stay focused on longer-term goals. This management pattern reinforces the constraints described earlier and shapes which objectives feel realistic to pursue.

Take social media, for example. When we asked survey participants what aspect of social media they wished they had more time for, 58% said they would create video content. Everyone knows they should create more videos, yet this year's data proves once again how challenging that can be. They know what's needed for long-term engagement, but the "right-now demands" to post something fast, like a photo with some text, win out.

Again, this isn't about a lack of strategy or commitment. It's about how long strategic work really takes.

Long-term communications work is difficult to sustain when it's managed with short-term expectations. Until expectations for meaningful impact are matched with comms-led planning, prioritization, and follow-through, progress will continue to feel harder than it should.

Taken together, these three realities describe a profession at a real inflection point: capable, experienced, and ambitious, but still working within systems that haven't grown with them. Let's explore the data in more detail and find where nonprofits have the greatest opportunities to close these gaps.

"There is very little time built in for reflection, planning, or evaluation. Everything is about the next deliverable, which makes it hard to do truly strategic work." ~ Leader of a Small Integrated Team

"Leadership wants long-term results, but the way work is assigned and evaluated is very short-term. That disconnect makes progress slower than it needs to be." ~ Leader of a Large Centralized Team

IN YOUR WORDS
WHAT MADE YOU PROUD

But first, let's celebrate! We asked survey takers to share what part of your communications work in 2025 gave you the most satisfaction or pride. Responses centered on visible impact, creative ownership, and tangible progress especially when communicators could see their work making a difference or coming together cohesively.

Developing strategies and communications plans

Successful campaign results

Creativity & trying new things

Our rebrand

Video storytelling

Responding nimbly to executive orders

Social media

IN YOUR WORDS
WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO

We also asked survey takers to share what they were most looking forward to in 2026. Responses reflect a mix of hopeful anticipation and cautious realism, with many communicators looking ahead to improvements in how they work, not just what they produce.

Being more strategic and data informed

Sharing more personal stories

Getting a LinkedIn presence organized

Brand Refresh

Increased video content

Pieces that require creativity: writing, graphics

Getting more educated
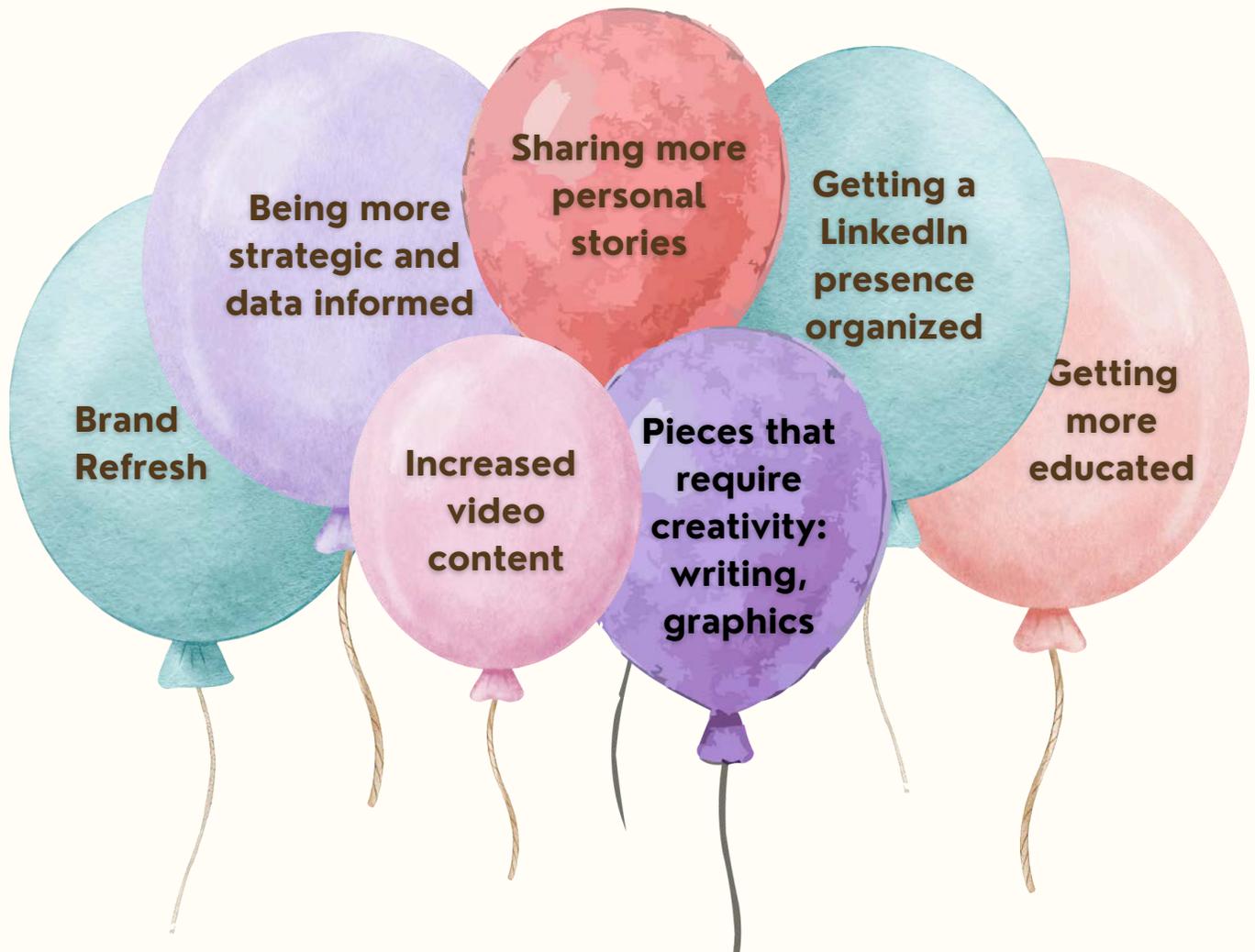
IN YOUR WORDS
FRUSTRATIONS, CHALLENGES, CONCERNS

But the party ends when we ask about frustrations and challenges of the last year and concerns and uncertainties about 2026. Across both questions, respondents describe a persistent strain that goes beyond any single task or channel. The most common challenges are not about creativity, but about capacity, structure, and sustainability. Here are some quotes:

"The constant feeling of being behind. No matter how much I accomplished, there was always more to do, and it was difficult to feel successful."

"Being reactive instead of strategic. So much time was spent responding to urgent requests that there was little room for planning or creativity."

"Getting buy-in from leadership on the importance of communications and being included early enough to make a real impact."

"Lack of capacity. There is simply too much work for one person, and it makes it hard to do anything as well as I'd like."

"Whether we will have the budget or staff capacity to keep up with expectations. I worry about being asked to do more with less again."

"Economic uncertainty and how that may affect budgets, priorities, and staffing."

"Burnout. I'm concerned about sustaining this pace long-term without additional support or clearer boundaries."

"Not knowing if we'll have the stability needed to plan beyond the short term."

"Whether leadership will truly invest in communications as a strategic function or continue to see it as a support role."

A CLEAR SET OF COMMUNICATIONS GOALS AND STRATEGIES DOMINATE

If you've taken our trainings, you've likely heard us share this Thomas L. Friedman quote: **In the world of ideas, to name something is to own it. If you can name an issue, you can own the issue.**

At NPMG, we give nonprofit communicators shared language with clear definitions for nonprofit marketing goals, strategies, and objectives. This isn't academic. Definitions are tools that help communicators describe what they do, explain why it matters, and take ownership of their role.

In the 2018 Trends Report, we identified 12 **communications goals** that capture the breadth of the work and asked nonprofit communicators to prioritize them. We asked the same questions again this year. The results are consistent. Nonprofit communicators continue to rank **community engagement, brand building,** and **raising awareness** as their top goals.

While the relative emphasis on some goals has shifted slightly, the overall hierarchy is steady. **Internal communications** and **thought leadership** appear more often in the middle tier than in 2018. Nonprofit communicators are clear about why communications work exists and what it is meant to accomplish.

We see the same pattern when examining marketing strategies. In the 2019 Trends Report, we named and surveyed 12 nonprofit **marketing strategies** for the first time. The 2026 data closely resemble those early findings too.

Permission-based marketing, content marketing, and event or experience marketing, continue to anchor nonprofit communications work. In 2026, a clear majority of nonprofit communicators rate **recruiting and engaging program participants** highly, reflecting a broader shift toward defining success through participation and action.

Partner and alliance marketing appears more frequently among higher-priority strategies than previously. **General advertising** is used more often by larger, Centralized Teams and less often by solo communicators and smaller teams. We believe this is driven by capacity.

Despite all the attention in the commercial sector on new platforms and tactics, none of the digital-native strategies, including **search marketing, influencer or ambassador marketing**, or **location-based marketing**, has replaced the more relational approaches at the center of nonprofit communications.

We don't see this as a failure to innovate, but as the stable foundation of our sector. If you are creating a strategy for the first time, we suggest starting with these core goals and strategies. They are well understood, widely applicable, and proven in practice. Extend beyond thoughtfully, when programmatic needs, staffing, and budget are available.

Core Nonprofit Marketing Goals
Community Engagement
Brand Building
Raising Awareness

Core Nonprofit Marketing Strategies
Permission-Based Marketing
Content Marketing
Event and Experience Marketing

HOW MANY GOALS SHOULD WE PRIORITIZE?

The most effective communicators don't focus on just one or two goals, but they don't treat everything as a top priority either. Effectiveness is highest when priorities are real, but bounded.

Survey participants who rated four to six goals as very or extremely important were the most likely to describe their communications as effective.

Effectiveness drops at both extremes, suggesting that neither narrow focus nor the "everything is essential" approach leads to better outcomes.

Goal density varies significantly by team structure. Integrated and Centralized Teams are most likely to cluster in the four-to-six goal range where effectiveness is highest. Internal Agency, Fundraising-led, and CEO-led Teams are far more likely to report seven or more high-priority goals, reflecting broader and less bounded expectations.

Solo communicators are the most likely to fall at the extremes, either naming very few priorities or treating nearly everything as a top priority.
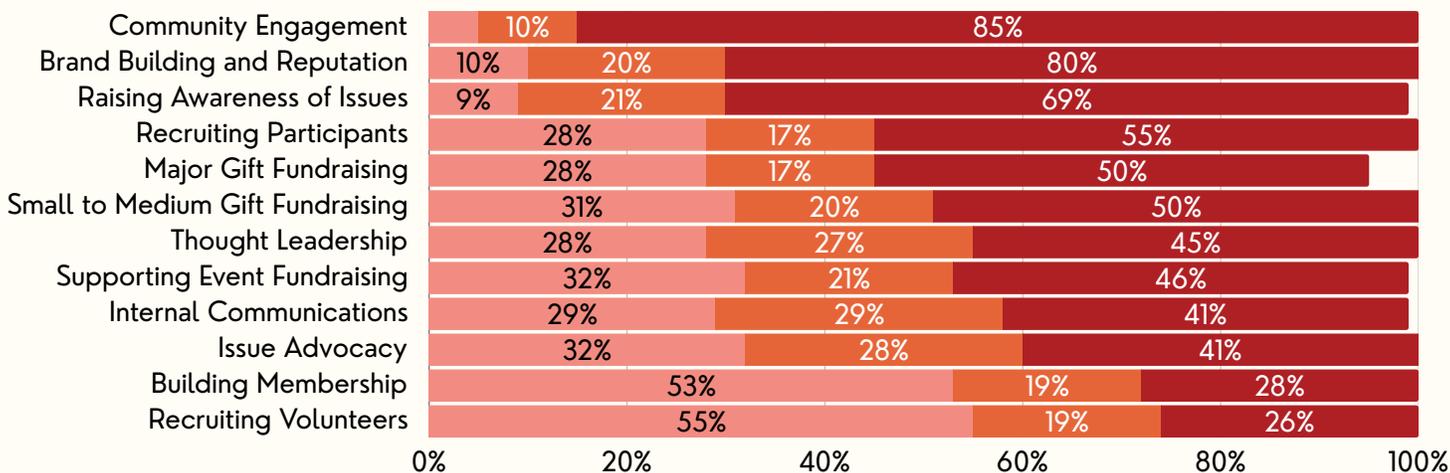
Integrated Teams are much more likely to rate Internal Communications as a Very/Extremely Important goal (54%, compared to 41% overall).

How Many Goals Nonprofits Rated as Very or Extremely Important

- 10-12 goals 10%
- 1-3 goals 13%
- 7-9 goals 28%
- 4-6 goals 49%
- n=322
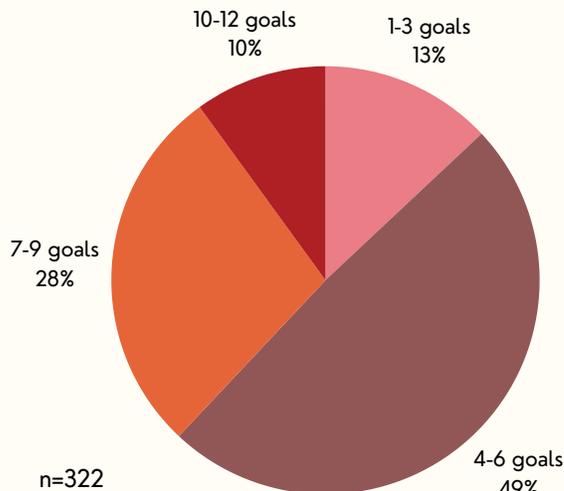
Relative Importance of Goals to the Nonprofit's Communications Strategy (%)

Legend: Not at all/Slighty · Moderately · Very/Extremely

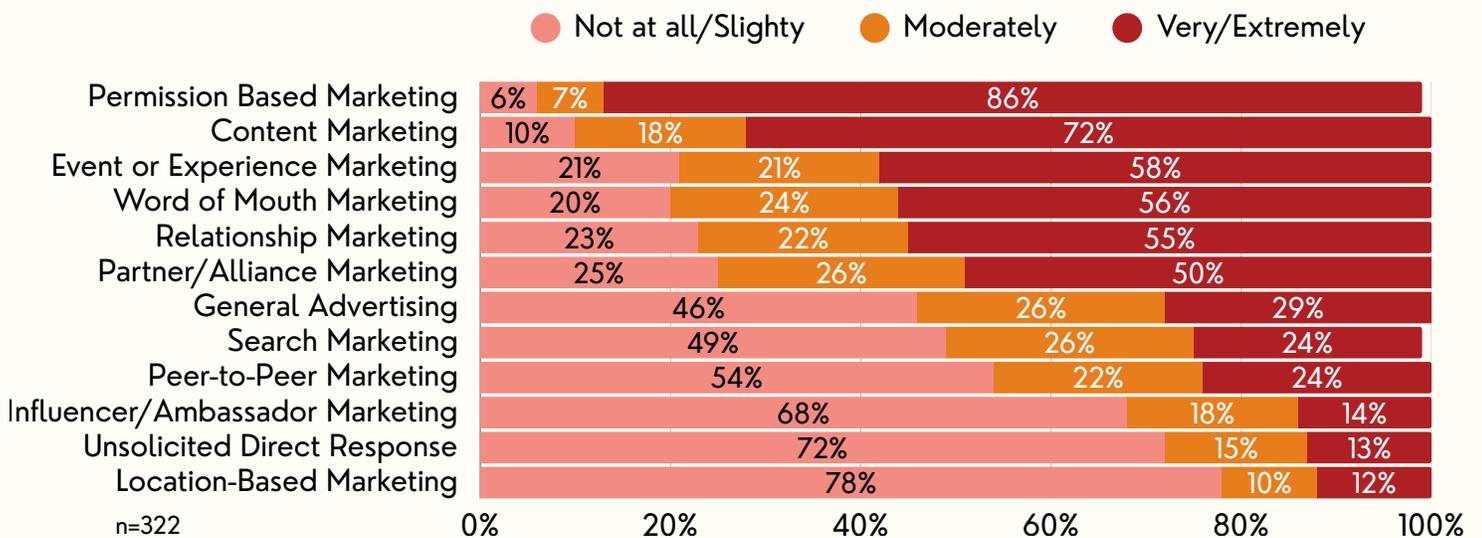| Goal	Not at all/Slighty	Moderately	Very/Extremely
Community Engagement		10%	85%
Brand Building and Reputation	10%	20%	80%
Raising Awareness of Issues	9%	21%	69%
Recruiting Participants	28%	17%	55%
Major Gift Fundraising	28%	17%	50%
Small to Medium Gift Fundraising	31%	20%	50%
Thought Leadership	28%	27%	45%
Supporting Event Fundraising	32%	21%	46%
Internal Communications	29%	29%	41%
Issue Advocacy	32%	28%	41%
Building Membership	53%	19%	28%
Recruiting Volunteers	55%	19%	26%

n=322

HOW MANY STRATEGIES SHOULD WE PRIORITIZE?

Integrated and Centralized Teams tend to prioritize a moderate number of strategies, most often in the four-to-six range, reflecting intentional choice rather than constraint. Internal Agency Teams skew slightly narrower, likely because strategies are chosen to meet specific execution demands rather than to shape long-term direction.

Effectiveness is not driven by how many strategies teams prioritize, but by how coherent those strategies are, according to this year's data.

More effective organizations tend to select strategies that reinforce one another operationally, sharing workflows, timelines, and measures of success.

Less effective teams are more likely to combine strategies that require very different kinds of work without adjusting expectations or resources, leading to fragmentation rather than flexibility.

Relative Importance of Marketing Strategies (%)

Legend: ● Not at all/Slighty ● Moderately ● Very/Extremely

Strategy	Not at all/Slighty	Moderately	Very/Extremely
Permission Based Marketing	6%	7%	86%
Content Marketing	10%	18%	72%
Event or Experience Marketing	21%	21%	58%
Word of Mouth Marketing	20%	24%	56%
Relationship Marketing	23%	22%	55%
Partner/Alliance Marketing	25%	26%	50%
General Advertising	46%	26%	29%
Search Marketing	49%	26%	24%
Peer-to-Peer Marketing	54%	22%	24%
Influencer/Ambassador Marketing	68%	18%	14%
Unsolicited Direct Response	72%	15%	13%
Location-Based Marketing	78%	10%	12%

n=322

"We are asked to use too many strategies at once, without clarity on which ones actually matter most. That makes it difficult to focus our time and resources in a way that feels strategic." ~ Leader of a Small Centralized Team

"Everything feels like a priority, so nothing really is. We end up spreading our efforts across too many channels and strategies instead of doing a few things well." ~ Solo Communicator working as an Internal Agency

"There is constant pressure to try new strategies without letting go of old ones. We rarely have the chance to stop and evaluate what's actually working." ~ Leader of a Large Integrated Team

HOW NONPROFITS MEASURE COMMUNICATIONS SUCCESS — AND WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

After examining communications goals in 2018 and strategies in 2019, we turned to objectives in the 2020 Trends Report. As with the earlier sections, we began by naming the work, organizing hundreds of possible metrics into 12 objective categories that reflect how nonprofit communicators define success. Participants selected their top three objectives from that list.

What we found in 2020 was not a single definition of success, but a consistent pattern. About half of survey participants included fundraising among their top objectives and half did not. Most defined success as a blend of revenue, participation, and relationship outcomes, rather than a single metric that communications teams were expected to optimize.

For the 2026 report, we revised the question structure to better reflect how objectives operate in practice. We first asked whether fundraising was included among a team's top objectives, then asked respondents to pair fundraising — or deliberately exclude it — with other outcomes. We also removed four objectives that had rarely appeared as top priorities in earlier years (expressions of trust; readiness or empowerment to act; behavior change; and change in tone or attitude).

Today, participation levels remain the most included objective (69%), followed closely by fundraising (64%). Objectives related to acquisition and retention remain central, with 49% prioritizing people joining, subscribing, or following and 45% prioritizing loyalty or retention. As with goals and strategies, we see stability in the sector.

What has changed is where the weight of measurement falls heaviest, and that shift helps explain the realities described earlier in this report.

Participation now sits more clearly at the center of how communications success is named. In 2020, fundraising slightly outpaced participation as a top objective. In 2026, participation is more consistently included, even among teams that also prioritize fundraising.

This suggests that success is increasingly defined by what people do after encountering communications. That clarity makes communications work easier to explain and defend, but it also narrows what tends to be measured and what's considered important.

Loyalty's position as an objective reinforces this. Nearly half of respondents include loyalty or retention among their top objectives, signaling that one-time action is rarely the end goal. At the same time, change in knowledge or understanding appears less frequently as a primary objective, included by 27% of respondents. This does not mean education or persuasion is less important. It means those outcomes are harder to point to when success must be proven quickly.

SOME CANADIAN CONTEXT:
While 10% of U.S. participants say their comms team size decreased permanently in 2025, only 3% of Canadians reported the same.

COUNTING HANDS, WHILE LOSING SIGHT OF HEARTS AND HEADS

When success is defined primarily by participation and fundraising, communicators are judged on outcomes that are easier to count, attribute, and explain. That reinforces Sweet 16 Reality #2: what gets measured shapes which goals feel safe to pursue.

A hearts, heads, and hands framework makes this a bit easier to understand. We at NPMG define engagement as a combination of awareness, interaction, and participation. Sometimes that process unfolds slowly over months; other times, such as during a natural disaster, it can happen all at once.

Fundraising and participation metrics capture the hands — the moment of action. They do not, on their own, capture what caught someone's attention (awareness in the heart) or what prepared people to act (interaction with the head), and certainly not whether the relationship will hold over time.

HOW WE THINK OF ENGAGEMENT

♥ **Awareness**	You've grabbed my attention by triggering an emotional response (laughter, hope, anger, guilt, etc.)
Interaction	I'm paying attention and thinking about what I'm seeing or hearing and interacting more with the content.
✋ **Participation**	I see your call to action and I'm doing what you asked.

Objectives tied to the hearts and heads work such as understanding, influence, and trust, are harder to defend under pressure, even when they are essential to long-term impact.

When participation outcomes become the dominant definition of success, communicators are pushed toward responsiveness, volume, and short-term wins — reinforcing Sweet 16 Reality #3. Long-term work still happens, but it becomes harder to plan for, resource, and protect.

Like many advisors in the sector, we at NPMG spent years arguing that awareness alone was not enough. We wrote a whole series of blog posts and developed training in 2014 to convince everyone that they couldn't stop at raising awareness. Now, we think the pendulum has swung too far toward action metrics and needs to reset so that we see the full spectrum of engagement activities.

WHAT DOES A FULLER MEASURE OF ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

Some communicators are pairing participation metrics with simpler upstream signals using data they already have: donations alongside prior email engagement, event attendance alongside site visits or content consumption, and advocacy actions alongside list growth or repeat interactions. These combinations do not always answer questions about attribution. They do, however, make the hearts and heads work more visible and meaningful.

Understanding these nuances is even more essential when you consider the changes happening with social media algorithms. For years, we and every other consultant told nonprofits to focus on engagement in the form of likes, comments, and shares and then to track whether that engagement resulted in action on your website, whether sign-ups, RSVPs, or donations.
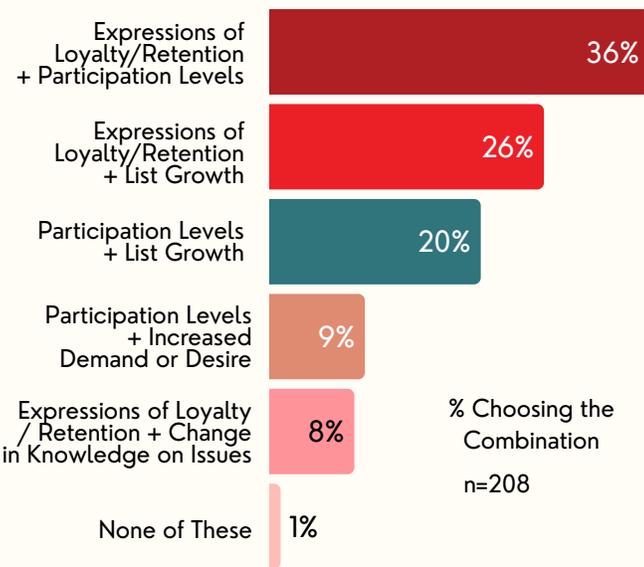
Today, these metrics rarely reflect what the algorithms are really looking for.

First, social media sites penalize you for trying to send traffic off-site without paying for the privilege through advertising. They do not want to see your links. Next, they care most about time on site. Did your followers (or anyone seeing your content) read your whole post? Did they watch until the end of your video? Do they repeatedly recognize you in their feeds and stop scrolling when they see your content? These are not participation metrics. They are signals of awareness and interaction.
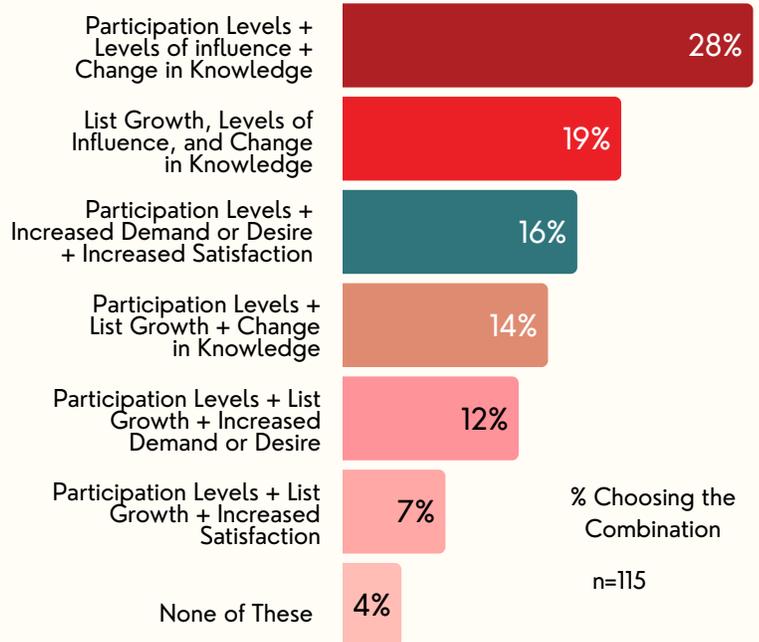
This year's survey data shows that nonprofit communicators are not confused about what success looks like. But they are operating within systems that reward certain outcomes over others. The tension they feel is not a lack of strategy — it is the challenge of being held accountable for long-term impact while being measured through short-term actions.

That disconnect sits at the center of the communications role today. It's why objectives, more than goals or strategies, reveal where the real struggle lies.

Add Two Objectives to Financial Gains/Fundraising

Combination	%
Expressions of Loyalty/Retention + Participation Levels	36%
Expressions of Loyalty/Retention + List Growth	26%
Participation Levels + List Growth	20%
Participation Levels + Increased Demand or Desire	9%
Expressions of Loyalty / Retention + Change in Knowledge on Issues	8%
None of These	1%

% Choosing the Combination

n=208

Top Three Objectives without Financial Gains/Fundraising

Combination	%
Participation Levels + Levels of influence + Change in Knowledge	28%
List Growth, Levels of Influence, and Change in Knowledge	19%
Participation Levels + Increased Demand or Desire + Increased Satisfaction	16%
Participation Levels + List Growth + Change in Knowledge	14%
Participation Levels + List Growth + Increased Demand or Desire	12%
Participation Levels + List Growth + Increased Satisfaction	7%
None of These	4%

% Choosing the Combination

n=115

"There's an assumption that if people aren't taking action right away, the communications didn't work. That overlooks awareness and understanding — often necessary steps before participation." ~ Member of a Large Centralized Team

"Leadership tends to focus on donations and attendance, but that ignores the work that happens before people are ready to act. If we don't invest in that, participation eventually suffers too." ~ Leader of a Small Integrated Team

"We're expected to change hearts and minds, but we're evaluated almost entirely on what people do next. That disconnect makes it harder to justify the time needed for deeper engagement." ~ Solo Communicator

CLARIFYING FUNDRAISING RESPONSIBILITY: WHERE ALIGNMENT MATTERS

The 2026 data show that misalignment around fundraising rarely happens when expectations are clear. It shows up most often in the middle.

When fundraising goals are very or extremely important, alignment is strong. More than eight in ten communicators who rate supporting individual giving (87%), major donor fundraising (85%), or event fundraising (83%) as highly important also name fundraising as a top communications objective. In these cases, fundraising is clearly owned as an outcome.

Alignment weakens when fundraising is only moderately important. In these situations, communicators are much less likely to name fundraising as an objective:

- Only 56–58% do so for individual or major donor fundraising
- Just 54% do so for event fundraising

This suggests that "moderately important" fundraising goals are often treated as supporting work, not as outcomes communications teams fully own. That distinction matters, especially when results are reviewed or questioned.

Event fundraising stands apart an important way. Many communicators understand event success primarily in terms of participation and engagement, with revenue as a shared or secondary outcome.

Together, these patterns point to a set of questions that need to be made explicit:

- If a fundraising goal is moderately important, is fundraising an objective communications is accountable for — or are you responsible for participation and engagement that support someone else's fundraising results?
- If you support event fundraising, are you being evaluated on money raised, attendance and participation, or both?
- If fundraising is an objective, is that expectation shared and measurable — or implied and retrospective?

Clarifying these distinctions upfront will reduce confusion about roles and responsibilities for sucess. It will also help ensure that communications teams are evaluated on outcomes they have the authority and capacity to influence.

"Communications is expected to support fundraising, but it's often unclear whether we're responsible for participation, revenue, or both. That lack of clarity makes it hard to define what success actually looks like." ~ Leader of a Small Centralized Team

"Leaders need to be clearer about what communications owns in fundraising and what we influence. When that line isn't defined, expectations become unrealistic." Leader of a Large Integrated Team

SOME CANADIAN CONTEXT:

66% of Canadian participants said event fundraising was very or extremely important, compared to just 46% of U.S. participants.

THREE ALIGNED PATHS FOR EFFECTIVE NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS WORK

Effectiveness in nonprofit communications is less about choosing the "right" goals or strategies and more about choosing combinations that make sense together. The 2026 data reveal three common ways more effective teams align their goals, strategies, and objectives. These are not prescriptions, but patterns, each offering a different, data-supported path to clarity and results.

THE RELATIONSHIP CENTER

Best fit for: Integrated Teams, Centralized Teams, small teams, and many effective solo communicators

Core Goals
- Community engagement
- Brand building
- Raising awareness of issues

Core Strategies
- Permission-based marketing
- Content marketing
- Relationship marketing

Objectives with Fundraising Results
- Fundraising results
- Loyalty or retention
- List growth

This is the most common and most stable pairing in the data. Fundraising is rarely pursued alone; it is most often paired with outcomes that reflect relationship health and list growth.

Objectives without Fundraising Results
- List growth
- Participation levels
- Loyalty or retention

This configuration reflects teams focused on strengthening and mobilizing their audience without direct responsibility for revenue outcomes.

ENGAGEMENT & EXPERIENCE ENGINE

Best fit for: Large teams, some Centralized Teams, and solo communicators with event responsibility

Core Goals
- Community engagement
- Raising awareness
- Supporting event participation or fundraising

Core Strategies
- Permission-based marketing
- Content marketing
- Event or experience marketing

Objectives with Fundraising Results
- Participation levels
- Fundraising results
- List growth

Fundraising is closely tied to participation. Revenue outcomes are typically understood as part of broader engagement, not as a standalone metric.

Objectives without Fundraising Results
- Participation levels
- List growth
- Loyalty or retention

This reflects teams responsible for driving attendance, involvement, and follow-through, while fundraising outcomes sit elsewhere in the organization.

THE PARTNER AMPLIFIER

Best fit for: Centralized Teams, some Internal Agency Teams, organizations emphasizing reach and credibility

Core Goals
- Raising awareness of issues
- Brand building
- Community engagement

Core Strategies
- Permission-based marketing
- Partner or alliance marketing
- Relationship marketing

Objectives with Fundraising Results
- Fundraising
- Loyalty or retention
- Audience growth

Fundraising appears in this model less frequently, but when it does, it is typically paired with relationship-strengthening outcomes rather than direct participation.

Objectives without Fundraising Results
- List growth
- Influence
- Loyalty or retention

This configuration reflects a longer-term pathway focused on reach, trust, and credibility through partners.

SEVERAL MISALIGNED COMBOS THAT HURT EFFECTIVENESS

The 2026 data also revealed some misalignments where goals, strategies, and objectives combined in ways that can create unwanted tension or unclear accountability.

Fundraising Goals without Fundraising Objectives. When participants rate one or more of the fundraising goals as moderately important, but do not include fundraising as a top objective. This can work, but expectations need to be explicit amongst the communications and development teams.

Participation Objectives without Participation-Supporting Strategies. Participation is named as a top objective (which happens for 69% of participants), but strategies selected emphasize awareness or reach rather than engagement or relationship-building. This combination appears more often among Internal Agency Teams and Fundraising-led Teams.

Broad Goal Sets With Narrow Authority. Teams rate seven or more goals as very or extremely important, but operate in Internal Agency, CEO-led, or Fundraising-led Team structures that have little authority to set boundaries and make trade-offs. This pattern is disproportionately common among solo communicators.

Relationship-Oriented Goals Without Relationship-Oriented Objectives Goals like community engagement or brand building are rated very important, but objectives focus narrowly on short-term participation or fundraising outcomes. This combination shows up across team sizes but is most common in organizations under sustained pressure for quick wins.

In each case, the problem is not effort or expertise. It's whether goals, strategies, and objectives are aligned in ways that make success more clear and achievable.

COMMS STAFF ARE VALUED, BUT THEIR WORK IS STILL LARGELY MISUNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS

When asked how well colleagues across their organization understand the role of strategic communications, only 5% of nonprofit communicators said their role is understood very well. A much larger share (39%) say colleagues understand the strategic importance of communications in general, even if they don't fully grasp the work involved.

At the same time, more than a quarter (26%) say communications is still mostly seen as content creation or promotion, and another 28% describe understanding as unclear or inconsistent.

In other words, outright misunderstanding of the communications role is relatively rare. But deep understanding is even rarer.

Most communicators operate in the middle ground, where communications is valued, but not fully understood. That distinction matters because how the role is understood shapes how the work is treated.

When communications is seen as a strategic function, teams are more likely to be involved earlier, asked to help shape project goals, and given room to make tradeoffs. When it is seen primarily as content production and distribution, teams are more likely to be brought in late, evaluated on responsiveness, and measured by outputs rather than impact.

The 2026 data show a strong connection between their colleagues' level of understanding and and how effective nonprofit communicators feel.

Respondents who describe their communications as effective are far more likely to say their role is understood as strategic. Those who feel less effective are much more likely to report unclear understanding or to be viewed mainly as order takers, regardless of size or mission.
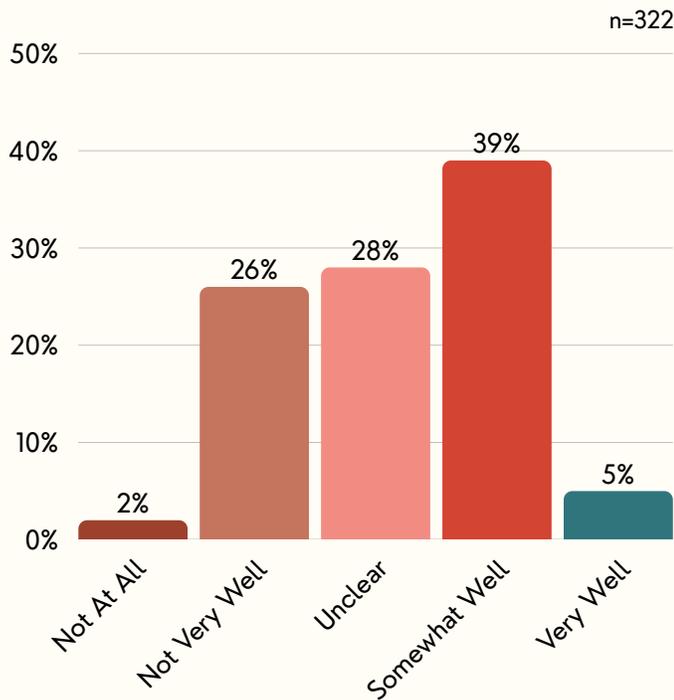
Let's be clear: this is not an awareness problem in the simple sense. Many communicators report that their work is appreciated. **What's missing is a shared understanding of what strategic communications actually requires: time to plan, authority to prioritize, and the ability to say no when tradeoffs are necessary.**

Without that shared understanding, communicators are asked to deliver long-term outcomes while operating under short-term expectations. They are held accountable for results without being fully empowered to shape the conditions that produce those results.

Until that gap in understanding closes, many communicators will continue doing strategic work without being fully recognized or resourced as strategic partners.

"People think communications just means making things look good or getting the word out, without understanding the planning, strategy, and decision-making that go into it." ~ Leader of a Small Centralized Team

How well do your colleagues across the organization understand the role of strategic communications?

n=322

Bar chart values:
- Not At All: 2%
- Not Very Well: 26%
- Unclear: 28%
- Somewhat Well: 39%
- Very Well: 5%

- **Not at all:** They don't understand what communications really does
- **Not very well:** They mostly see communications as content creation or promotion
- **Unclear:** They understand some parts, but confuse or overlook others
- **Somewhat well:** They recognize the strategic importance, even if they don't know all the details
- **Very well:** They understand both the strategy and the day-to-day work

Biggest barriers to your team being seen and used strategically? Select as many as apply.

Bar chart values:
- Too reactive / no time for strategy: 63%
- Treated as order takers who just make things: 61%
- Lack tools, systems or data: 43%
- Excluded from strategy or program meetings: 38%
- Leadership doesn't understand strategic comms: 31%
- Comms is under fundraising, programs or events: 29%
- Inadequate training or confidence on team: 23%
- Other: 12%

n=180

What single factor helped your organization understand and embrace the role of strategic communications?

Factor	Percentage
Cross-team collaboration has built trust in comms	47%
Comms is included in organizational planning early	15%
Leadership champions the communications strategy	15%
We actively educate staff about what we do and why	10%
We regularly report on outcomes or impact of comms	6%
Other	5%
External coaching, facilitation, or training	

n=142

What would help shift how your org views and uses comms?

"Adequate staffing and time would change everything. It's hard for others to value strategic communications when we're constantly in crisis mode." ~ Solo communicator working directly for the CEO

"Clear support from executive leadership would make the biggest difference. When leadership treats communications as strategic, the rest of the organization follows." ~ Leader of a Large Integrated Team

"Leadership needs to better understand that communications is not just about promotion. We should be involved earlier in planning and decision-making so strategy can actually shape outcomes." ~ Leader of a Small Centralized Team

What advice would you give to others trying to elevate the role of comms?

"Build relationships internally. Credibility doesn't come from one big win, but from consistently showing up as a strategic partner." ~ Leader of a Large Integrated Team

"Take time to explain the strategy behind what you do. People often don't realize how much planning and thinking goes into effective communications." ~ Leader of a Small Integrated Team

"Frame your work in terms leadership cares about. Talk about outcomes and organizational goals, not just tactics or channels." ~ Leader of a Large Centralized Team

PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE: WHERE PLANNING AND GOOD INTENTIONS BREAK DOWN

Nonprofit communicators often wonder whether having a different kind of software or adopting a new tool might finally bring order to their chaotic work lives. So this year we asked about how they used project management tools at several workflow stages: editorial or content planning; request intake; team collaboration (e.g., assigning tasks and tracking deadlines); managing draft reviews and approvals; and personal task management.

We found that across these planning and content workflows, just over half of nonprofit communicators rely primarily on their "house" software systems of either Google Workspace or Microsoft Office. These teams are not at a disadvantage overall compared to teams using dedicated project management platforms. **This shows that the issue is rarely the software itself.**

Most respondents report having some way to plan ahead. Only 10% say they have no project management system for editorial or content planning.

It's at points of interruption where the plan breaks down. When requests arrive through email, messages, or informal conversations, responsiveness becomes the default. More than a third of survey takers (34%) say they do not use any system to manage communications requests from other departments. Among solo communicators, that rises to 55%.

This reflects a lack of shared systems for setting priorities, managing volume, and making tradeoffs visible. Strategic work, even when well planned, becomes something communicators try to fit in between interruptions, rather than something the organization actively protects.

Reviews and approvals of drafted content follow a similar pattern. While most teams manage drafts using Google or Microsoft tools, nearly a quarter (23%) report having no system for managing reviews and approvals. The time spent navigating last-minute changes or unclear feedback is rarely tracked, which makes a significant portion of communications work effectively invisible.

Team structure helps explain some of this. Large Internal Agency Teams are far more likely to have systematized request management (they are, after all, positioned as order takers). Solo communicators are the least likely to have any intake system at all, even though they face many of the same demands.

Dedicated project management platforms (e.g., Asana, Monday) can help as complexity increases, but they are not a magic solution. What matters most is whether organizations have systems that manage interruptions, surface tradeoffs, and protect planned work.

This is one of the clearest examples in the 2026 data of how capable communications teams can still feel stretched and reactive. The challenge is not knowing what to do. It's managing every step in the content creation workflow, so that you can slow things down, make deliberate choices, and protect long-term work from constant interruption.

Which project management tool do you use most for . . .

EDITORIAL OR CONTENT PLANNING

30% Microsoft

24% Google Workspace

15% asana

10% No project management system used

6% monday.com

No other project management tools exceeded 5%

MANAGING COMMS REQUESTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS

34% No project management system used

22% Microsoft

14% asana

12% Google Workspace

5% monday.com

No other project management tools exceeded 5%

MANAGING DRAFT CONTENT, REVIEWS, COMMENTS, AND APPROVALS

28% Microsoft

27% Google Workspace

23% No project management system used

6% asana
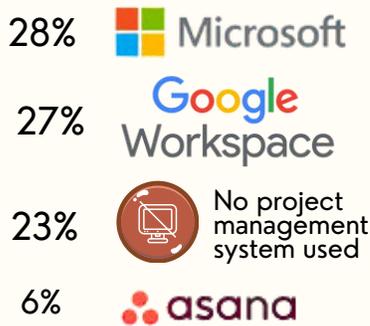
No other project management tools exceeded 5%

TEAM COLLABORATION (DEADLINES, ASSIGNMENTS, TASK TRACKING)

23% Microsoft

19% asana

18% No project management system used

17% Google Workspace

7% monday.com

No other project management tools exceeded 5%

PERSONAL TASK OR TO-DO LIST MANAGEMENT

25% Microsoft

19% Google Workspace

16% No project management system used

14% asana

6% monday.com
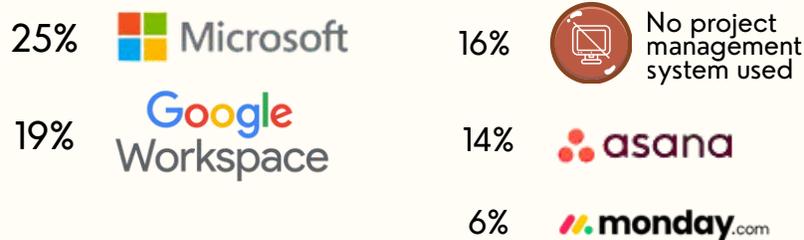
No other project management tools exceeded 5%

n=322

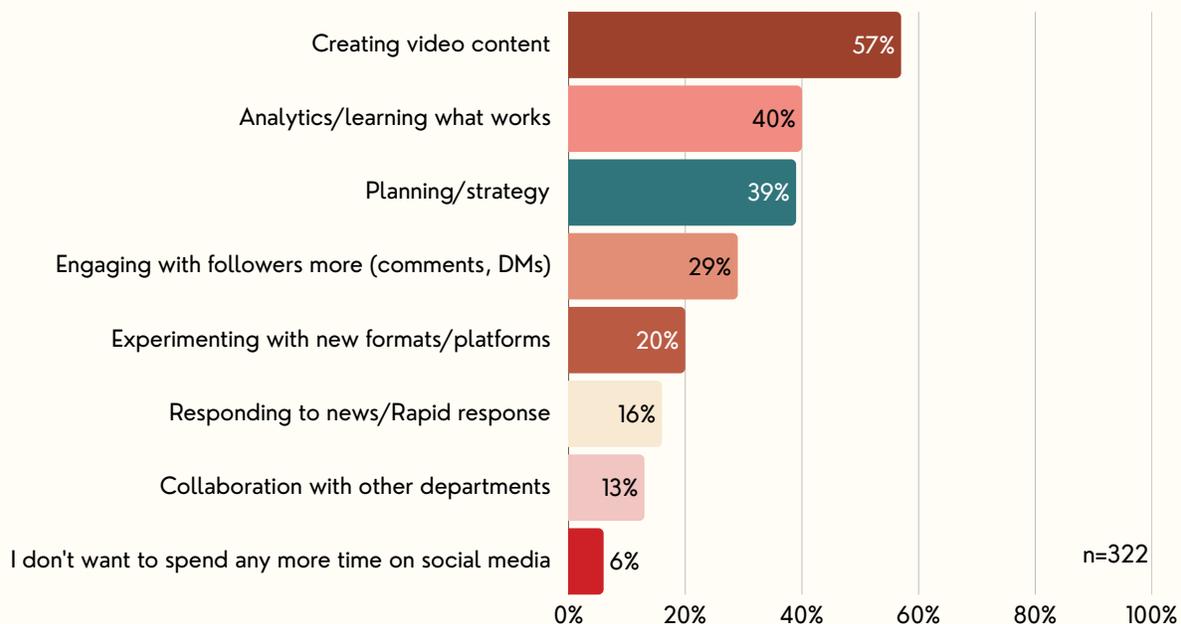# NONPROFITS ARE FEELING THEIR WAY FORWARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is in a weird in-between phase right now. Algorithms have changed the game as they build feeds solely to keep users scrolling. The old rules don't work anymore, but the new rules aren't clear yet. Likes, comments, and other engagement numbers aren't as helpful now, but nothing solid has fully replaced them.

Our data seems to show that most nonprofit communicators can sense this shift, even if they can't put it into words. They know something has changed. They just aren't really sure what to do next. So instead of charging ahead or walking away, many are slowly feeling their way forward.

When asked what they wish they had more time for on social media, the top answer by far is creating video content (58%). Video is one of the few things that still feels predictable. It works well on today's platforms, and people can see it working. After that, respondents say they want more time to look at results (40%) and more time to plan and think ahead (39%). Fewer are worried about higher quality content or engaging with followers. These answers point to a field that is trying to hold onto what still works while searching for better ways to decide what success looks like now.

What aspect of social media do you wish you had more time for? (Select up to 3)

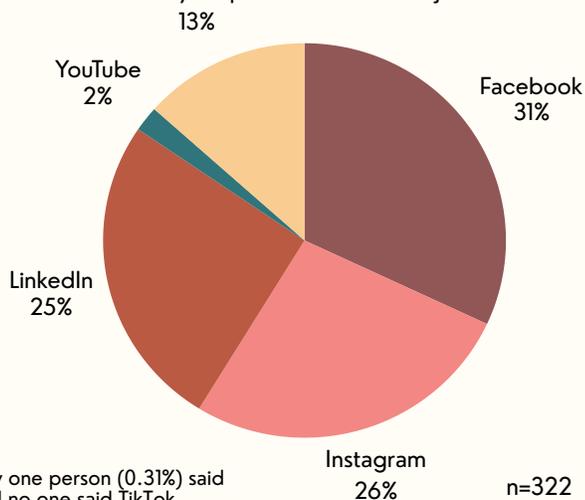| Category	Percentage
Creating video content	57%
Analytics/learning what works	40%
Planning/strategy	39%
Engaging with followers more (comments, DMs)	29%
Experimenting with new formats/platforms	20%
Responding to news/Rapid response	16%
Collaboration with other departments	13%
I don't want to spend any more time on social media	6%

n=322

We see this same "feeling it out" pattern when we look at what platforms helped them most in 2025. Facebook still comes out on top (31%) with Instagram (26%) and LinkedIn (25%) close behind. These are the channels nonprofits know how to use and can usually count on for steady results.

But when asked where they want to invest more time going forward, the answers shift. LinkedIn jumps to the top (36%), Instagram follows (26%), and Facebook nearly disappears, cited by just 4% of respondents.

That gap tells us a lot about Facebook. Facebook has consistently been the "most reliable" social media platform whenever we ask this question. However, it always ranks toward the bottom when we ask which platform nonprofits want to invest more in or where nonprofits would like to experiment. Facebook feels less like a strategic choice and more like a given. Most nonprofits use it because it's familiar, dependable, and fairly easy to manage, even if it's not where they're most excited to put their energy.

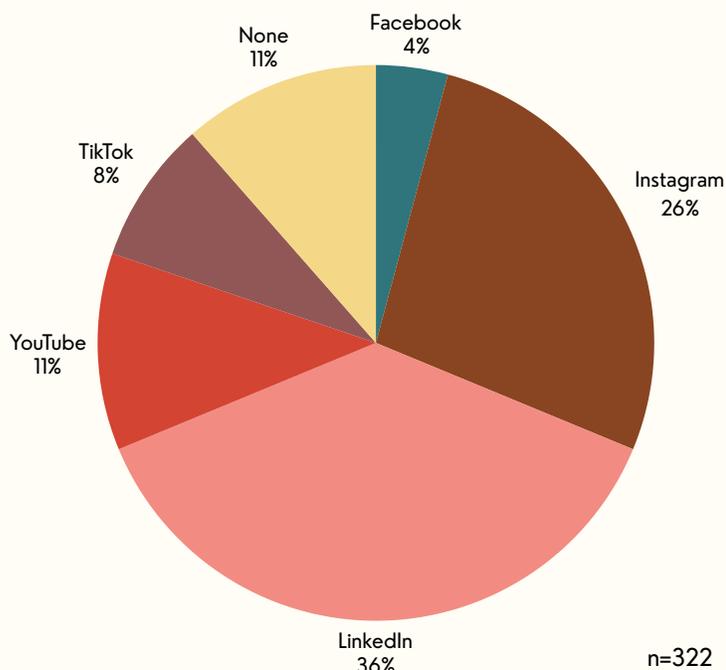## Which platform most reliably helped you achieve your objectives in 2025?

Social media does not reliably help us achieve our objectives.

*Only one person (0.31%) said X and no one said TikTok

n=322

In 2026, which platform would you like to invest more time in?

n=322

That becomes even clearer when we break the data down by team size, effectiveness, and role maturity. Among respondents who say they do not want to invest more time in any social media platform, just over half (53%) come from large communications teams. Similar patterns show up among communicators who rate their work as more effective and among those who are not the first person in their role.

In contrast, solo communicators and those who are the first in their roles are much more likely to want to invest more time on a more creative platform like Instagram. Among survey takers who say they want to invest more time there, more than 70% come from solo communicators (34%) and small team leaders (37%).

This doesn't mean more experienced teams are giving up on social media. It points to caution. Teams with more experience have spent more time chasing results on platforms where the rules keep changing. They are less likely to add more work without clearer signals that it will matter.

Solo communicators and those who are first in their roles are in a different spot. Many are still trying to figure out what works now, and Instagram can feel like the next step after Facebook. It's familiar enough to seem manageable, but different enough to feel like progress. Wanting to invest more time there reflects that search for direction — not a desire to do more for the sake of doing more.

Unfortunately this data doesn't point to a clear new playbook for nonprofits on social media. Instead, it shows a field in the middle of a long shift. They're leaning toward video, asking for more time to think and plan, and being careful about where they put their energy. Some keep using familiar platforms like Facebook because they're dependable. Others look toward platforms like Instagram or LinkedIn because they feel like the next step. All of it reflects the same thing: **nonprofit communicators aren't standing still when it comes to social media. They're feeling their way forward while the ground continues to move under them.**

"Social media is treated like a silver bullet, when in reality it's just one piece of a much larger communications system."
Leader of a Small Centralized Team

"There is a lot of pressure to make social media drive immediate results, even though it's better suited for awareness and engagement."
Solo communicator acting as an Internal Agency

EMAIL IS ESTABLISHED.
THE SYSTEMS AROUND IT HAVEN'T CAUGHT UP

Email is one of the most established tools in nonprofit communications, and that maturity shows up clearly in this year's survey. Across organizations of different sizes, levels of effectiveness, and team structures, many email practices look pretty much the same.

Nonprofit email practices tend to fall into a few broad tiers, and adoption drops as the work requires more setup, sustained effort, and internal alignment.

PRACTICES MOST ORGANIZATIONS ARE ALREADY USING

Most respondents say they are using foundational email practices. Sixty-five percent send personalized emails, and 67% say they use segmented email lists. Segmentation is often based on things like relationship status (donor level, event registrant, program participant) or specific interests.

This reflects a meaningful shift away from sending the same message to everyone, and suggests that most nonprofits have moved beyond the most basic form of email communication.

PRACTICES THAT SIGNAL MORE INTENTIONAL EMAIL WORK

Adoption drops when email work requires more planning and follow-through. Thirty-four percent of respondents use UTM codes to track email performance, 29% use a welcome series of three or more emails, and 27% test subject lines using A/B testing.

These practices signal intention and effort. They require systems to be set up correctly and time to review results, but they are still far from standard across the field with only a third or less adopting these practices.
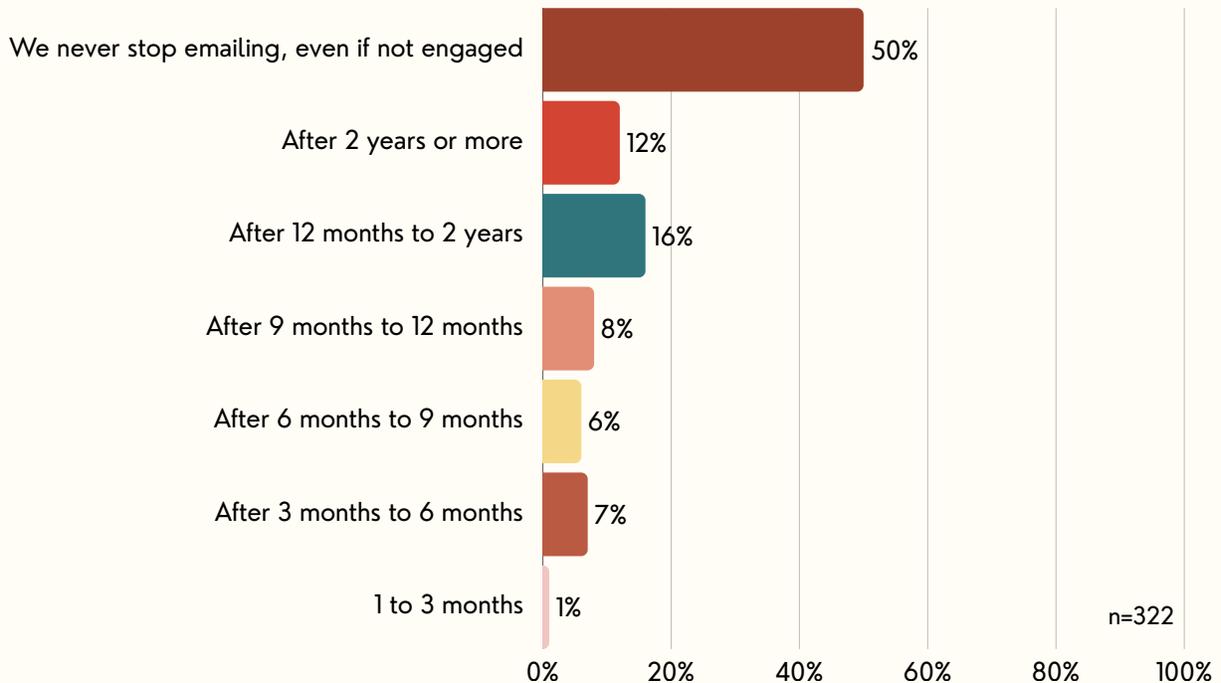
PRACTICES THAT REQUIRE SUSTAINED EFFORT AND INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

Adoption drops most sharply when email work requires ongoing attention or a willingness to cut overall list size. Only 14% of respondents say they run re-engagement campaigns designed to win back unengaged subscribers, and only 12% use dynamic or conditional content that changes based on subscriber data.

These practices rely heavily on knowing how to configure and maintain more complex tools inside a CRM or ESP. It's often unclear how to set up these systems, keep them running over time, trust the data well enough to automate decisions, or get buy-in from leadership.

These limitations become especially visible when we look at when nonprofits stop emailing unengaged subscribers. We did see the biggest drop among those who say they never stop emailing subscribers even when they are unengaged. (It was 69% in 2020 then 61% in 2022.) **But half of respondents (50%) still say they never stop emailing people entirely in 2026, even if those subscribers haven't engaged at all.**
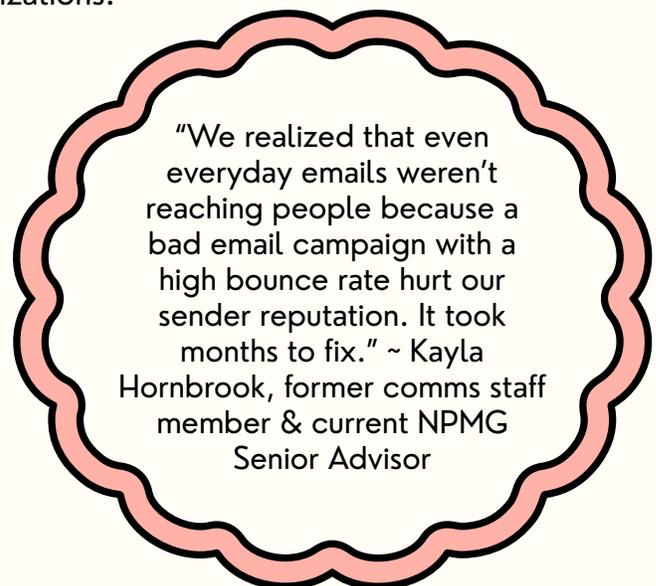
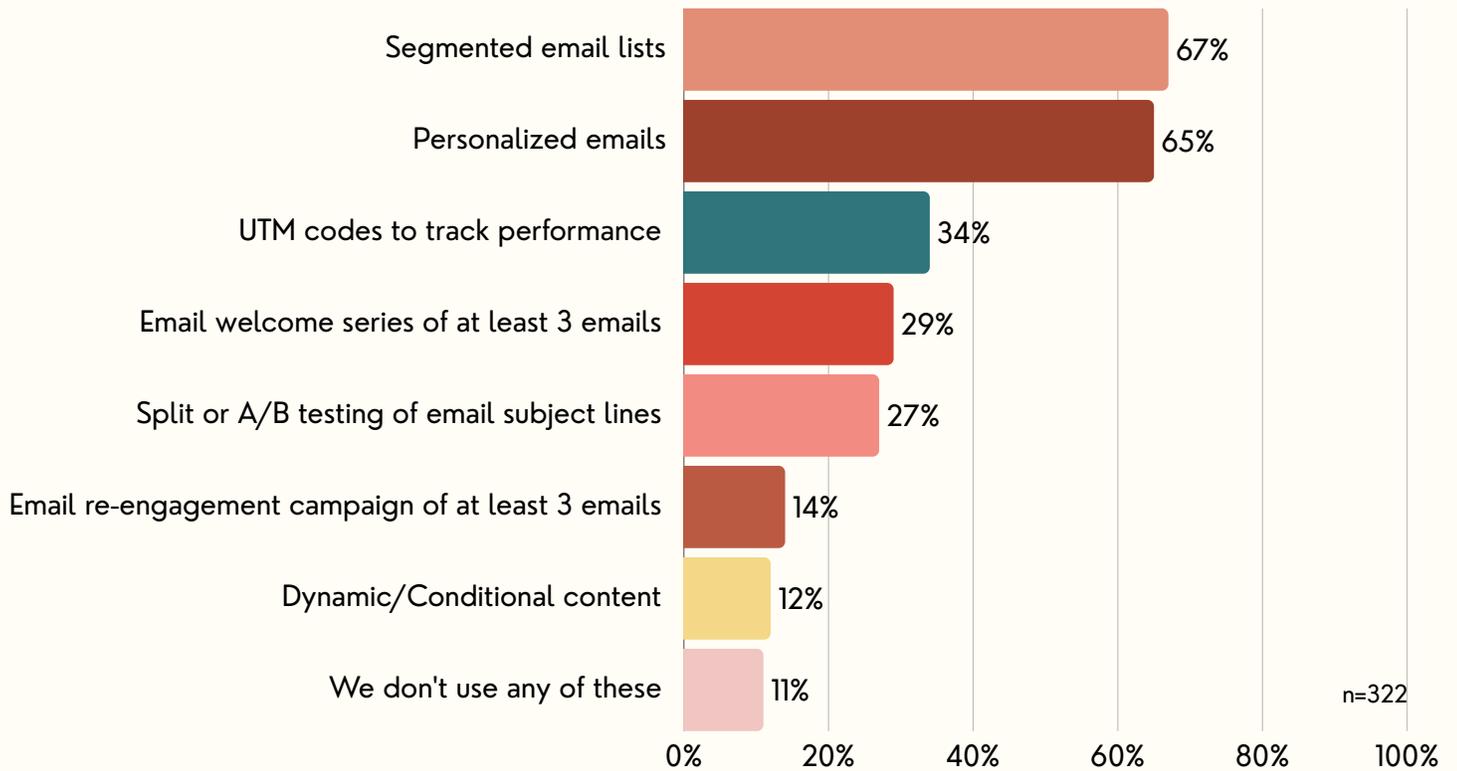## When do you stop emailing people entirely? When they haven't engaged in...

Category	Percentage
We never stop emailing, even if not engaged	50%
After 2 years or more	12%
After 12 months to 2 years	16%
After 9 months to 12 months	8%
After 6 months to 9 months	6%
After 3 months to 6 months	7%
1 to 3 months	1%

n=322

Only about 7% stop emailing unengaged subscribers within the first six months, and 22% stop within the first year. Meanwhile, 28% say they don't stop emailing unengaged subscribers until a year or more has passed.

When measurement is inconsistent and re-engagement campaigns are uncommon, cutting your email list may feel too risky despite its benefits. In that context, continuing to email unengaged subscribers becomes the default rather than a deliberate choice. Unfortunately the ramifications of an unhealthy email list can be catastrophic to organizations.

We did see one meaningful difference when we looked at how well communications is understood across the organization. Fifty-seven percent of respondents who feel less well understood say they never stop emailing unengaged subscribers, compared to just 42% of those who feel well understood. This 15-point gap suggests that **internal understanding and buy-in may play a part in how nonprofits manage their lists**.

"We realized that even everyday emails weren't reaching people because a bad email campaign with a high bounce rate hurt our sender reputation. It took months to fix." ~ Kayla Hornbrook, former comms staff member & current NPMG Senior Advisor

Which of the following do you currently use in your email work? (Select all that apply)

Option	Percentage
Segmented email lists	67%
Personalized emails	65%
UTM codes to track performance	34%
Email welcome series of at least 3 emails	29%
Split or A/B testing of email subject lines	27%
Email re-engagement campaign of at least 3 emails	14%
Dynamic/Conditional content	12%
We don't use any of these	11%

n=322

This year's results show that email work becomes harder to sustain as it moves away from activities that are immediately visible and rewarded. In organizations where communications work is less well understood, that challenge is even harder, because decisions like reducing list size can be harder to explain or defend internally. **The result is a widespread pattern that reflects how difficult it can be to prioritize long-term list health in environments that still reward list size and short-term metrics.**
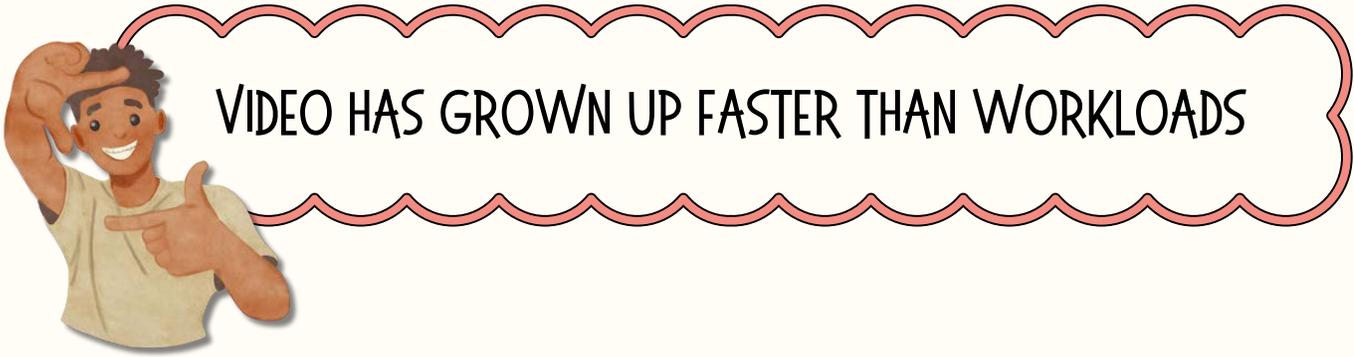
VIDEO HAS GROWN UP FASTER THAN WORKLOADS

Video is no longer a fringe tactic for nonprofit communications teams, but that doesn't mean it's easy to sustain.
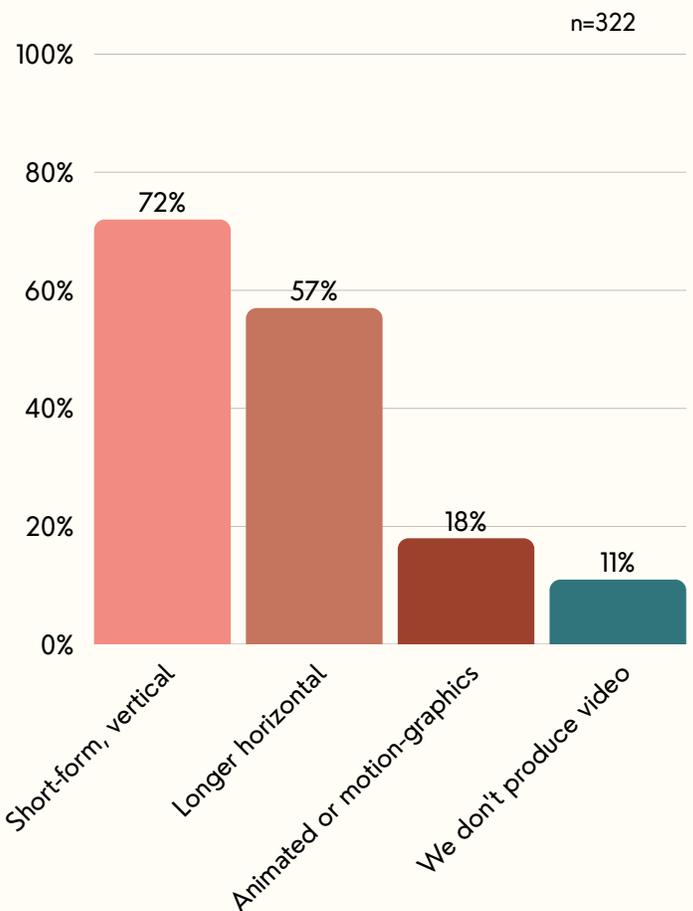
When asked broadly about video use, most organizations say they do produce video content (89%). Shorter, vertical videos make up the bulk of the work with 72% of nonprofits producing those and longer horizontal videos are next with 57%. Seventeen percent are creating animated or motion-graphics videos.

For those who said they create video, the most **common formats are fairly straightforward and practica**l.
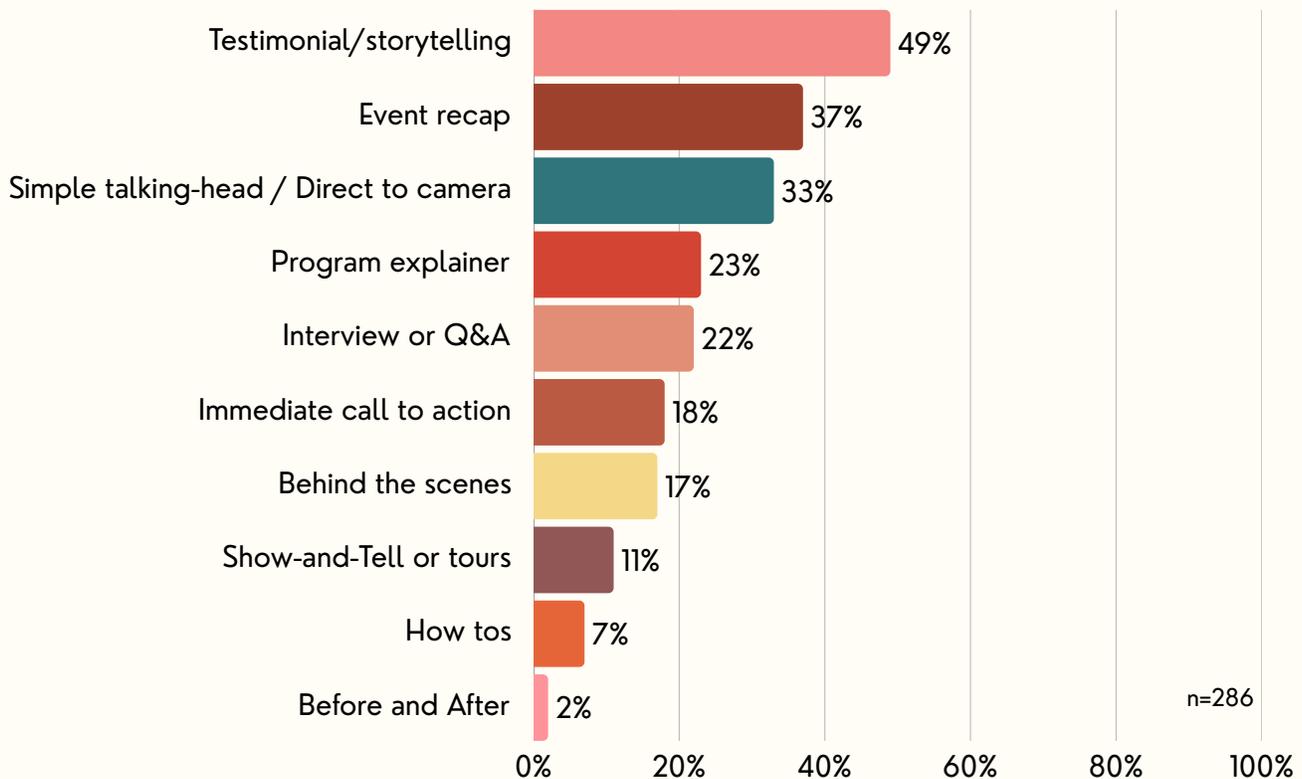
Nearly half say they produce testimonial or storytelling videos (49%), followed by event recaps (37%) and simple talking-head or direct-to-camera videos (33%). These formats are flexible, relatively quick to produce, and easier to fit into a busy workload.

More complex formats show up less often. About 24% say they produce program explainer videos, 22% produce interviews or Q&A-style videos, and 18% create videos with an immediate call to action. Fewer teams report producing behind-the-scenes videos (17%), show-and-tell videos or tours (11%), or how-to videos (7%). Very few teams say they create before-and-after videos (2%).

What types of video formats do you create? (Select all that apply)

n=322

Format	Percentage
Short-form, vertical	72%
Longer horizontal	57%
Animated or motion-graphics	18%
We don't produce video	11%

What types of video content did you post the most in 2025? (Select up to three)

Category	Percentage
Testimonial/storytelling	49%
Event recap	37%
Simple talking-head / Direct to camera	33%
Program explainer	23%
Interview or Q&A	22%
Immediate call to action	18%
Behind the scenes	17%
Show-and-Tell or tours	11%
How tos	7%
Before and After	2%

n=286

Video production frequency is where the workload issue becomes most obvious and team size matters. For those who said they create video, larger teams are much more likely to produce video on a regular basis than nonprofits with smaller communications staffs.

Among large communications teams, 27% say they produce video weekly and another 34% say they produce video monthly. Only 32% of large teams say they create video just a few times per year.

That shifts as teams get smaller. Among small teams, 21% say they produce video weekly and 31% monthly, while 43% say they only create video a few times per year.

And only 16% of solo communicators say they produce video weekly and 21% monthly. Nearly half (47%) say they only create video a few times per year with another 16% say they rarely produce video at all.

Put simply: **larger teams are far more likely to make video part of their regular communications work.**

How often does your organization create video content?

n=286

Bar chart values:
- Daily: 1%
- Weekly: 21%
- Monthly: 30%
- A few times per year: 41%
- Rarely: 7%
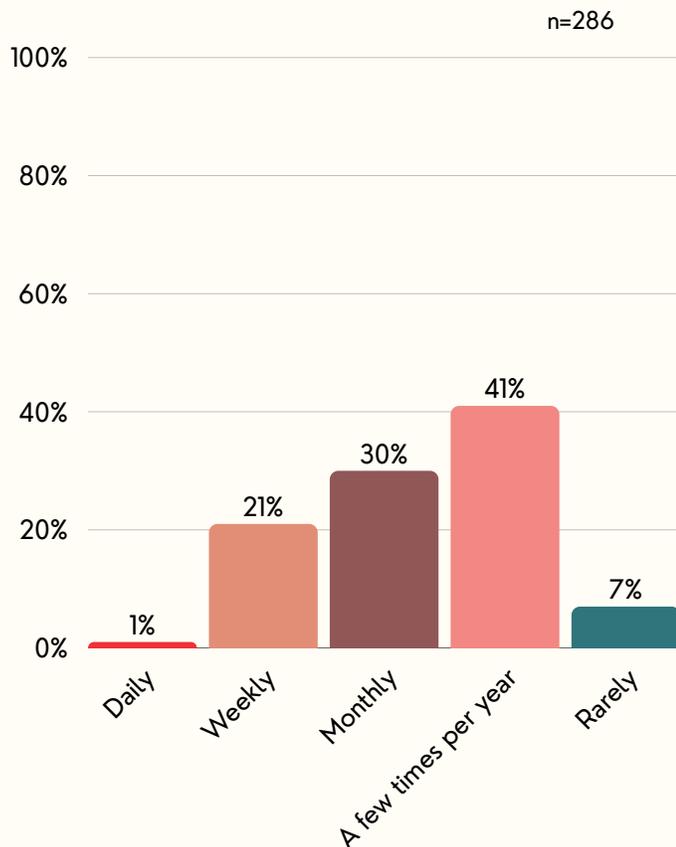
Going back to our social media data, this is an interesting shift, as larger teams are often the most likely to say they don't want to spend more time on social media. But with video, the issue doesn't seem to be focus. It's capacity. And, of course, those larger teams are the ones most able to take on the time commitment video can require.

Finally, we also asked what tools nonprofits were using to edit videos.

Not surprising considering most nonprofits use it, Canva leads with over half of video-producing teams (59%) using it followed by Adobe tools (47%). After that, usage drops off quickly across built-in social media editors (31%), phone-based editors and CapCut (both 19%).

Most nonprofit teams understand the value of video and are already using it in some way. What's harder is sustaining it. Video requires planning, follow-through, and time. **As expectations for video continue to rise, the gap between what teams are asked to do and what their workloads allow becomes more obvious.**
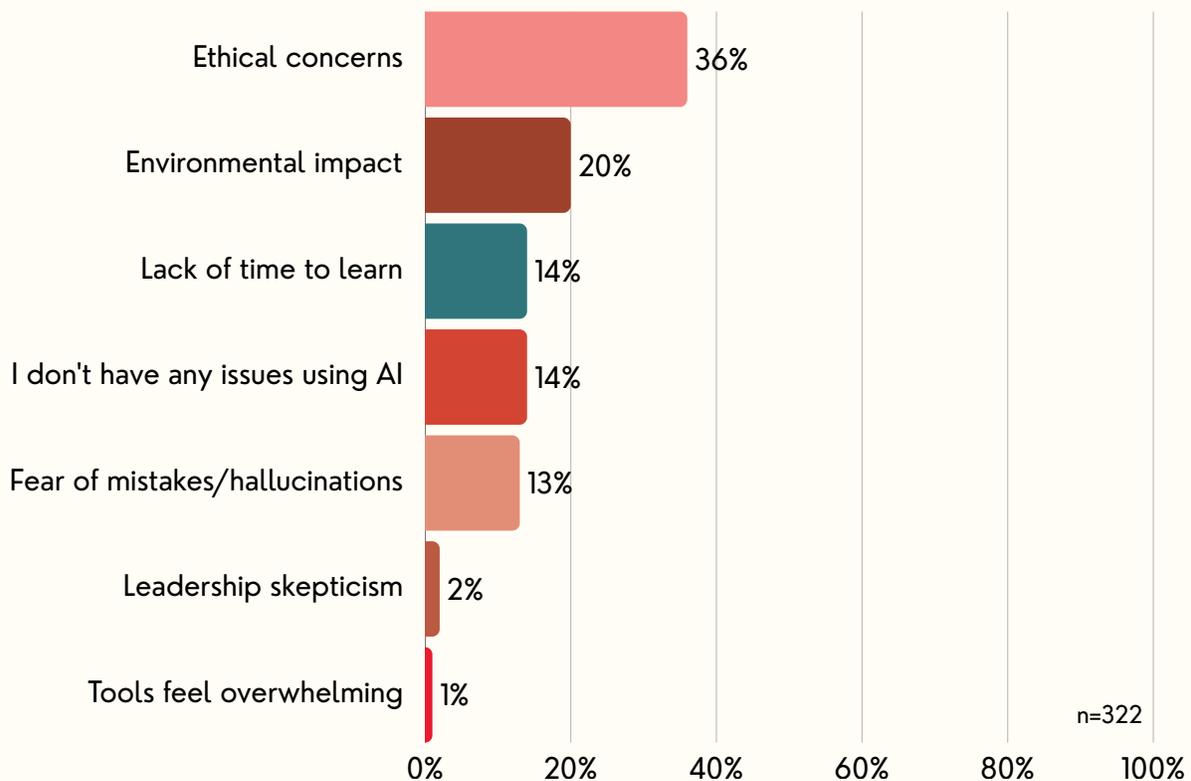
AI IS OLD ENOUGH TO HELP, BUT NOT OLD ENOUGH TO TRUST COMPLETELY

When it comes to using AI, nonprofits are willing, but cautious, and still deciding where the boundaries should be. Most respondents say they are using **at least one AI tool in some way (84%)** with only **16% saying they don't use AI at all**. This is similar to our 2024 data where 19% said they didn't use it all.

While AI-use is widespread, its flaws are well known. But when asked about their biggest issue with AI, there was no single concern that clearly took over. Ethical questions (36%), the environmental impact (20%) and worries about mistakes or inaccurate outputs (13%) were among the most common responses, but neither dominated the conversation. Fourteen percent said they just lacked the time to learn and another 14% said they don't have any issue with AI at all. Only 13% are worried about mistakes or hallucinations though. That could be a result of early AI training emphasizing this issue so procedures are already in place to combat it.

What is your biggest issue with using AI?

Ethical concerns	36%
Environmental impact	20%
Lack of time to learn	14%
I don't have any issues using AI	14%
Fear of mistakes/hallucinations	13%
Leadership skepticism	2%
Tools feel overwhelming	1%

n=322

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Attitudes toward AI were noticeably consistent as we did not find meaningful differences based on team size, team structure, organizational budget, or mission area.

There is no clear "type" of nonprofit that is more skeptical or more enthusiastic than the rest. Even among environment (and animal-focused) nonprofits, environmental impact concerns about AI are not meaningfully higher than in the field overall.

And people who say they don't use AI tools at all also aren't any more likely to point to strong ethical concerns, lack of time to learn, or other specific barriers.

Non-use doesn't line up neatly with any single issue.

Looking at how AI is being used by those who have adopted it, most use AI for low-risk, supportive tasks: editing, proofreading, drafting copy, or helping with basic design work. Tools like Grammarly, Canva's built-in AI features, and AI embedded in everyday software show up more often than standalone or advanced platforms.

AI, at least for now, is treated like a capable helper — useful, but still watched closely.

Overall, the AI story in this year's report is less about resistance and more about readiness. AI is being used to support the work, save a little time, and reduce friction, while people continue to reconcile its use with their objections.

"There's excitement about AI, but also confusion about how it fits into real communications work without adding more pressure."
Leader of a Small Centralized Team

"AI has potential to save time, but only if leadership understands that it doesn't replace strategy or judgment."
Leader of a Large Integrated Team

ACCESSIBILE COMMS IS PAST THE AWARENESS STAGE

Creating accessible communications is a moderate to high priority for 79% of nonprofit communicators with only 4% of nonprofits saying it is not a priority at all. We do see differences in priority based on team size with 53% of large teams saying it is a high priority as opposed to small teams (39%) and solo communicators (29%). **So accessibility matters across the board, but teams with more capacity are more likely to elevate it to a top-tier priority.**

We also see confidence in accessibility work drop based on team size. Forty-one percent of large teams are very or extremely confident but only 28% of small teams and 19% of solo communicators rated themselves as very or extremely confident in their organization's ability to produce inclusive and accessible communications.

This drop in confidence suggests that while many communicators understand what accessible communications should look like, fewer feel they have the time, tools, or processes to produce it consistently.

In practice, that means many nonprofits are starting with changes that are easier to control day-to-day and don't require formal review processes or specialized expertise. Data shows accessibility is happening at the content level first. While only 17% are doing accessibility reviews before publishing, best practice use jumps from there:

ACCESSIBILITY PRACTICES USED BY NONPROFITS

- Writing clear, plain language (77%)
- Using readable fonts (75%)
- Using captions on videos (68%)
- Using accessible color contrast (68%)
- Adding alt text to images (68%)

Clearly nonprofits understand the important of accessible communications as the work to make it happen is well underway. Most nonprofits are making thoughtful, concrete improvements to the content they produce, even if formal accessibility checks and workflows haven't caught up yet.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report is meant to reflect what nonprofit communications work actually feels like right now. It's not just what tools are being used or what's trending.

Many of the patterns in these pages will likely feel familiar. That's not a coincidence.

The data shows a field that largely knows what effective communications looks like, but often has to do that work inside systems that make it harder than it should be.

If you're reading this and thinking, "Yes, that's exactly it," you're not alone.

Rather than offering a checklist or a single "right" way forward, this report is designed to help you put language around what you're experiencing and to see how common those experiences really are. Use it as a mirror, a reference point, and a source of perspective.

Research alone doesn't solve these challenges, but shared language can make them easier to address.

For those who want to go further, Nonprofit Marketing Guide offers additional resources, training, and a community of nonprofit communicators who are working through these same questions in real time. Many people turn to those spaces when they're ready for practical tools, deeper learning, or simply connection with peers who understand the work.

Here are a few ways nonprofit communicators tend to use this report most:

- **To clarify priorities.** The data can help you step back and look at where your time, energy, and expectations are concentrated. And where things may have drifted out of alignment.

- **To support conversations with others.** Many readers use sections of this report to help explain communications work to colleagues or leadership, especially when discussing capacity, best practices, measurement, or why certain work takes longer than expected.

- **To help think through decisions.** Whether you're looking at a new tool, a new channel, or a new tactic, seeing what's common (and what's not) across the field can be grounding.

- **To feel less isolated.** One of the clearest takeaways from this year's data is how widely shared many challenges are. Feeling stretched, reactive, or unsure is not a personal shortcoming — it's a pattern shaped by how communications work is structured and supported.

Wherever you are in your role right now, we hope this report leaves you feeling a bit clearer, a bit more grounded, and knowing that you don't have to navigate this work on your own.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

This report is based on an online survey by Nonprofit Marketing Guide in December 2025. The survey was administered and analyzed using SurveyMonkey.com with additional statistical analysis by ChatGPT.

We recruited participants primarily through email and social media requests by Nonprofit Marketing Guide and colleagues in the sector. As such, it is not based on a random probability sample where all members of a population have an equal or known chance of being selected.

USE OF AI IN CREATING THIS REPORT

We believe in transparency on AI use. We created a custom GPT in ChatGPT to make sure only the data we uploaded was used in the analysis and did frequent checks against SurveyMonkey to make sure the data was accurate. NotebookLM was also used to help us compare data from our previous 15 trends reports. The report was created using Canva, and while we didn't use their AI feature to create any images, we did use its "copy style" feature to edit graphics, creating a more cohesive look. ChatGPT was also used to help us find patterns across questions and to clean up copy. Kivi Leroux Miller and Kristina Leroux take full responsibility for every word.

The full survey was completed by 322 participants. All 322 participants said they spend at least 50% of their time on communications or marketing work at their nonprofit organizations. 80% of participants are in the United States, 11% are in Canada, and the remainder are from other nations around the world.

AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE 322 SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

- 70% are responsible for communications or marketing
- 21% are responsible for a combination of communications and development
- 3% are responsible for development only
- 6% are executive, operations, or board leaders
- Less than 1% are responsible for program or service

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

If the data you are seeking isn't in this year's report, it's likely in reports from recent years. Register for a [free membership](#) at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com to access these reports.

In the 2025 Report
- The top challenges nonprofits face today compared to ten years ago
- Data-supported ways to protect your time
- Data on the effectiveness of communications channels
- Data on the efficiency of AI and AI favorite tools
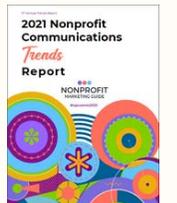- Help on adapting to the U.S. political climate

In the 2024 Report
- How nonprofits are using and responding to AI
- The types of social media content nonprofits post most often
- The four most common brand archetypes used by nonprofits
- How nonprofits communications staff manages the marcomm budget

In the 2023 Report
- Five themes that need addressing ASAP
- Why nonprofits use social media and how they use video
- Data on team size and growth as well as salaries and how to plan for future growth
- New data on how well your tech platforms integrate

In the 2022 Report
- How nonprofits are implementing DEI policies
- What to expect from your communications team as it grows
- Data on the strategic use of communications
- How often nonprofits use 15 different communications channels
- How nonprofit communicators can build healthier habits around time and productivity

In the 2021 Report
- Data on managing time and boundaries
- Relative importance of various communications channels
- Adoption of various email, social media, and messaging best practices

In the 2020 Report
- Data on nonprofit communications objectives
- How nonprofits manage their email lists
- How nonprofits are engaging supporters on social media
- Effective communications team models
- The types of skills nonprofit communicators want to develop
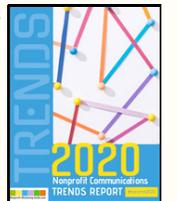
ABOUT US

NONPROFIT MARKETING GUIDE HELPS NONPROFIT COMMUNICATORS LEARN THEIR JOBS, LOVE THEIR WORK, AND LEAD THEIR TEAMS.

We want you to be effective and happy in your communications work so that your nonprofit can be successful in changing the world for the better. We also want you to keep your professionalism and energy in the nonprofit sector, knowing that you could very well make more money in the corporate world.

That's why we focus not only on the most effective marketing and communications tactics and strategies for nonprofits, but also on your personal wellness and growth in the work.

HOW WE ARE DIFFERENT

We are a training and coaching company. That's all we do.

Unlike most online training providers in our sector, we are not using webinars to upsell you on software or consulting services. The training and coaching are our only services.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO US

Understanding and Empathy
We listen closely to nonprofit communicators and empathize with their challenges, valuing lived experiences equally.

Enthusiastic Problem Solving
We tackle challenges with creativity and enthusiasm, embracing tools and processes that make nonprofit work easier.

Being Direct and Pragmatic
We provide honest, practical advice focused on real-world solutions, respecting your limited time and energy.

Living Our Lives in Draft
We learn from our mistakes and constantly strive to improve, committed to doing better for ourselves and for you.

Please explore all that we have to offer you and your communications team at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com.

NONPROFIT MARKETING GUIDE

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