



Email Marketing & CRM for Nonprofits

Tips & Best Practices

This guide will walk through email marketing best practices and tips for nonprofit email content, email marketing key performance indicators, platform recommendations, and relevant resources.

Setup Your Account

Verify & Authenticate Your Email-Sending Domain (IMPORTANT)

It is recommended that you verify that you are using a valid from-email address through the email marketing platform that you use. To verify your email-sending domain (@example.com) through your email marketing platform, you'll need to find documentation that walks you through how to do this. Below are some common platforms' documentation.

MailChimp [verification](#) & [authentication](#)

Active Campaign [verification](#) & [authentication](#)

MailerLite [verification](#) & [authentication](#)

Constant Contact [verification](#) & [authentication](#)

Due to recent regulations, it's highly recommended that you authenticate your email sending domain through as well. This authentication will tell other email providers (like Gmail and Yahoo) that you are who you say you are, and prove that you're not spam.

This will increase your chances of landing in your recipient's inbox. To authenticate your email-sending domain, you'll need to follow the documentation provided by your chosen email marketing platform.

Build a Quality (& Compliant) Email List

- Prioritize collecting & recording consent.
- Create a plan for segmenting.
- Include a visible unsubscribe link in every email.
- Include a link to your privacy policy in your emails.
- Consider removing contacts who have received but not opened the last 5-7 emails you've sent. Consider other ways to re-engage them.



Plan Your Strategy

Define & Segment Your Audience

- **By Status:** donors, volunteers, beneficiaries, partners
- **By Giving History:** one-time, monthly, high-value
- **By Interests & Preferences:** specific programs, volunteer opportunities, events
- **By Location:** local, regional, national, international
- **By Engagement Level:** new subscribers, active supporters, lapsed donors.

Craft Subject Lines That Drive Action

- Shorter subject lines tend to perform better (30 to 50 characters, 5 to 7 words), but always be sure to keep it under 60 characters.
- Avoid words like "claim", "free", and "urgent" as these can trigger spam filters. Instead, focus on words like "support," "survey," "donate," "issue," and "news".
- Personalized subject lines tend to perform better.
- A/B test subject lines and find trends into what's working and what's not.
- [37 Subject Lines for Fundraising](#)

Provide Valuable Content

- Consumers like to see relevant and engaging content. Share content that is informative and relevant to your audience.
- Test different types of content to see what your audience engages with most. Some ideas are below, but try testing education/informational content against community-oriented content to see which gets the most engagement.
- [24 Content Ideas for Non-Profit Newsletters](#).

Make Sure Your Recipients Know What Your Asking of Them

- Use clear and compelling "calls-to-action". A call-to-action is a button or link in your email that encourages the reader to take a specific action, such as "Donate," "Learn More," or "Sign Up." Think of it as a prompt that guides the reader on what to do next.

Make Technology Work for You

- Use AI to generate and brainstorm content ideas, write subject lines and copy, and even generate visuals.
- Reduce manual tasks data entry, follow-up emails, and survey responses.



Execute

Send Smarter, Not Harder

- Whether you send one email a month or several emails a month, recipients tend to react more positively to emails sent on a regular cadence. It sets expectations and builds trust.
- Emails sent on Wednesdays and Fridays show higher engagement rates among nonprofit audiences.
- Late morning and early afternoon emails perform better among nonprofit audiences.

Keep a Regular Frequency & Cadence

- Whether you send one email a month or several emails a month, recipients tend to react more positively to emails sent on a regular cadence. It sets expectations and builds trust.

Monitor Results

The below chart walks through the most common Key Performance Indicators to help evaluate the performance of your email campaign.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Industry Average*
Open Rate. The percentage of recipients who open your email out of the total number of recipients who received it.	40.04%
Click Rate. The percentage of recipients who clicked on a link or CTA in your email out of the total number of recipients who received it.	3.27%
Hard Bounce Rate. The percentage of emails that are permanently undeliverable out of the total number of emails sent. Hard bounces typically occur due to invalid email addresses, non-existent domains, or blocked email servers.	0.21%
Soft Bounce Rate. The percentage of emails that are temporarily undeliverable out of the total number of emails sent. Soft bounces typically occur due to issues such as the recipient's mailbox being full, the email server being down, or the email being too large.	0.69%
Unsubscribe Rate. The percentage of recipients who opted out of receiving future emails from your campaign after receiving a particular email.	0.18%
Website Conversion Rate. The percentage of email recipients who take a desired action on your website, such as filling out a form, out of the total number of recipients who received the email.	Varies

**averages based on the industry "Non-Profit"*



If you find any of your metrics are well off the industry average, here are tips on how to go about improving your performance.

Troubleshooting Guide
Is your open rate too low? Try testing out different styles of subject lines. For example, you can A/B test using a very plain, to-the-point subject line against an interest-grabber.
Is your click rate too low? Ensure your call-to-action buttons are clear, concise, and relevant to the recipient's interest. Explore using different call-to-action language and elements.
Is your hard bounce rate too high? This likely means the email addresses in the list are either not valid email addresses, or the email sending domain is facing issues with deliverability. Try exporting your list of contacts, running them through a validation system like DeBounce.io, and removing any email addresses that come back invalid. Consider removing contacts that have not engaged with any of your past several emails sent.
Is your soft bounce rate too high? There isn't usually much you can do when this happens. Consider reducing the email's size, and the amount of content included in the email.
Is your unsubscribe rate too high? Re-evaluate the contacts on your list, and re-evaluate the content you are including in your email. Is this content applicable to the recipients on my list? Am I providing value to my recipients?
Is your website conversion rate too low? Consider refining your email content and calls-to-action to better align with your audience's interests and needs, and ensure your landing pages are optimized for conversions. Your call-to-action in emails should be clear and obvious.

Tips & Ideas for Nonprofit Email Content

Tell Your Story

- *Emotional Appeal:* Share stories that highlight your mission and the impact of your work.
- *Visual Content:* Use photos and videos to bring your stories to life. Utilize personal and local content whenever you can. Recipients like to see what's going on in their communities.
- *Donor Spotlights:* Feature stories of any donors or volunteers, and the difference their contributions make in the community. Recipients like to see impact.
- *Volunteer Spotlight:* Highlight individual volunteers, their roles, and how they contribute to your mission.
- *Organization's Milestones:* Share important achievements, anniversaries, or goals met to demonstrate your progress and celebrate together.

Segment Donors



- *Tailored Messages:* If applicable, consider sending different messages to one-time donors, recurring donors, and potential donors.
- *Personalized Appeals:* Customize your messages based on donation history and interests.
- *Specific Requests:* Be clear about what you want recipients to do (e.g., donate, volunteer, sign a petition).
- *Easy to Act:* Make sure the donation process or sign-up form is simple and user-friendly.
- *Notes from Leadership:* Include a personal note from your leadership team to build trust and connection, sharing updates or reflections.
- *Wish List:* Share a list of items or support your organization needs, such as supplies, sponsorships, or volunteer roles, and show how fulfilling these needs helps your mission.

Showcase Impact

- *Impact Reports:* Share regular updates on how donations are being used and the results achieved.
- *Thank You Messages:* Send personalized thank-you emails to acknowledge and appreciate donors' contributions.
- *Testimonials:* Include quotes and testimonials from beneficiaries and supporters.
- *Social Media Integration:* If applicable, encourage recipients to follow and share your work on social media.

Consistent and Frequent Communication

- *Regular Updates:* Keep your audience informed with regular newsletters and updates.
- *Event Invitations:* If applicable, promote events, webinars, and fundraisers to keep your community engaged.
- *Non-Fundraising Emails:* Share success stories, volunteer opportunities, and educational content to build a stronger relationship with your audience.
- *Holiday Campaigns:* Take advantage of holidays and special dates for themed campaigns and appeals.

What To Look For In a CRM

- **Donor Management:** Track contributions and engagement.
- **Volunteer Coordination:** Schedule and communicate effectively.
- **Event Management:** Track and manage the marketing and operations of event planning.
- **Email Integration:** Seamlessly connect with email marketing tools.
- **Analytics & Reporting:** Gain insights to drive decisions.
- **Scalability:** Grows with your organization.
- **Seamless Integration:** Either integrates with your preferred email marketing platform, or includes an email marketing platform.



Popular Email Marketing Platforms

- [MailChimp](#)
- [Active Campaign](#)
- [MailerLite](#)
- [Constant Contact](#)

Popular CRM Platforms

- [Salesforce Nonprofit Cloud](#)
- [Neon One](#)