

Fundraising Workshop Follow-up Questions

Q1 Workshop: Fueling Your Mission – Development Strategies for Organizational Sustainability

What is the best strategy for fundraising for startups who have NOT established bigger donors/followers yet? i.e. crowdfunding.

There is no single best strategy for fundraising as a startup nonprofit. Success requires a multi-faceted approach that builds diverse revenue streams while establishing trust and credibility with both existing and potential donors. Start with one or two fundraising strategies, refine them, and expand into other strategies as your capacity grows. Below are some actions to help new nonprofits gain traction.

1. Set-up Your Organization to Fundraise - Before diving into fundraising tactics, ensure you have the right infrastructure in place:

- **Website:** A well-designed, mobile-friendly website that clearly communicates your mission, impact, and ways to give, with a prominent DONATE button on every single page.
- **Donation Page:** Make giving seamless with a simple, secure, and visually appealing donation form, both online and for mailed donations. Offer multiple payment options (credit card, PayPal, ACH, checks, etc.).
- **Storytelling & Messaging:** Create a compelling case for support and impact stories, visuals, and videos to illustrate your work and build emotional connections with potential supporters.

2. Acquisition – i.e. Growing Your Supporter Base

- **Engage Your Board:** Your board should introduce you to potential donors.
- **Social Media:** Actively engage on platforms where your audience spends time (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, etc.). Share impact stories, testimonials, and behind-the-scenes content.
- **Email Marketing:** Build an email list by collecting addresses at events, through website sign-ups, and volunteer events. Send personalized, mission-driven content.

- **Community Engagement:** Network. Attend in-person events and follow-up with people you meet. Online, respond to questions and comments, run polls, conduct surveys, and encourage discussions to foster a sense of belonging.
- **Maximize Free & Low-Cost Marketing**
 - **Google Ad Grants:** Eligible nonprofits can receive **\$10,000 per month** in free advertising through Google Ads. **Apply here:** [Google Ad Grants](#)
 - **Earned Media & PR:** Send press releases about milestones and events to media, offer expert commentary on issues related to your mission, submit OpEds, build relationships with journalists.

3. Funding Strategies

A. Individual Donors

- **Ask:** Ask via email, via social media, at live events, through your board.
- **Small-dollar donations:** Emphasize that even small contributions drive impact.
- **Peer-to-Peer Fundraising:** Encourage supporters to host their own campaigns (e.g., birthday fundraisers, run/walk events).
- **Monthly Giving:** Encourage recurring donations.

B. Foundation Grants

- **Mission Alignment:** Look for grantmakers aligned with your mission, community foundations, family foundations. Resource: [Candid's Foundation Directory Online](#)
- **Follow Best Practices:** Research funders thoroughly (use their publicly available 990s), tailor proposals, and establish relationships before applying.

C. Corporate Sponsorships

- **Identify Corporate Partners:** Look for companies aligned with your mission. Enlist the help of board members and your network to get in the door.
- **Offer Visibility & Engagement:** Illustrate how a partnership benefits both the company and the community to company decisionmakers.

D. Crowdfunding

- Have an established group of social followers and a solid email list.

- Provide a tangible, achievable, time-sensitive goal that illustrates the impact of a donation – “We’re raising \$10,000 by May 1, 2025 to provide 150 community families with locally grown fruits and vegetables for the next year.”
- Personalize it with your impact stories.
- Plan your outreach and provide progress reports.
- Secure a matching donor to leverage donations.

E. Host Fundraising Events

- **Informal Events:** Casual meet-and-greets, networking events, or behind-the-scenes tours intended to raise funds (always include an ask).
- **In-person Fundraisers:** Galas, auctions, or other fundraising events specifically intended to raise funds.
- **Virtual Events:** Webinars, live streams, or online challenges to reach a broader audience.

F. Stewardship & Donor Retention: Thank donors promptly, in a manner tailored to the donor and donation, provide reports and regular updates on the impact of their gifts, and engage them through personalized communication. Strong stewardship builds trust, increases retention, and lays the groundwork for future giving, including major gifts and legacy donations.

What is a reasonable timeline for fundraising expectations for a startup nonprofit and how much can we expect to raise?

Fundraising timelines and revenue expectations will vary widely based on an organization’s mission and impact, existing network, strategic plan, your capacity and available resources. It’s probably most helpful here to think of fundraising in phases.

- **First 6–12 Months: Donor Acquisition**
Focus on building your potential donor base, developing relationships, and establishing credibility. Build your case for support and generate your impact stories. Draft your comprehensive fundraising plan. Get your board involved. Early funds often come from or through close networks (board members, volunteers) or a start-up grant. Grant proposals to foundations can take six to eighteen months to secure.
- **1–2 Years: Build**
Execute on your comprehensive fundraising plan, including adding any fundraising staff

and resources as funds become available to support them. Continue prospecting and acquiring potential donors. Continue with grant proposals to foundations, continue individual outreach, begin to reach out to corporate supporters. Events and crowdfunding campaigns can help build momentum. Volunteer activities can build community.

- **3-5 Years: Scaling & Diversification**

At this stage, nonprofits typically have more data to demonstrate impact, which helps attract larger funders, major gifts, and multi-year commitments.

How much you can raise in your initial years really depends on the strength of your programming and your impacts, your strategic plan, your fundraising plan, your current donor and potential donor base, your capacity, and how much time and effort you can commit to fundraising. Set a realistic annual fundraising goal based on the cost of running the organization's programs, operations, staff salaries, overhead for the year, and add in a reasonable growth target.

Can you provide a road map for giving through a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) and an example of an organization with good communication around DAF giving?

1. Identify and Research Your Past DAF Gifts and Conduct Outreach: if you have received DAF gifts in the past, see if the communication provides contact information to the originating donor.

- If you have contact information, conduct outreach and legally compliant stewardship (thank the originating donor but do not provide a tax receipt).
- Provide information about the impact of the gift.
- Ask for future gifts.
- Ask for testimonials about why they selected your organization through their DAF.

2. Communications and Awareness Building

- Provide information on your ways to give webpage with easy instructions for making DAF grants. Include your entity's legal name, address, and tax identification number.
- Clearly state that your nonprofit accepts DAF gifts on your website, in your appeals, donation forms, newsletters, and other donor communications.

- Conduct specific outreach or appeals about DAF gifts one or two times a year to your individual donor base.
- Host educational events/webinars on tax-wise giving that include DAFs.
- Use testimonials to highlight successful DAF impact stories.
- Encourage donors to notify your organization when they are directing a DAF gift so they can be properly acknowledged and stewarded.

4. Strengthen Fundraising and Stewardship Strategies

- Train gift officers and frontline fundraisers to discuss DAF giving with donors. Some donors may not realize that through their DAF, they can direct unrestricted gifts, sponsor matching campaigns, or support urgent needs.
- Ensure prompt acknowledgment processes that comply with DAF rules. Fidelity Charitable provides [this resource, including a thank you template](#) for thanking originating donors of DAF gifts.
- Report back on the impact of DAF gifts through personalized updates, annual reports, and targeted communications.

5. Track, Measure Success, Adjust

- Develop goals for DAF fundraising, such as the number of new DAF donors, rates of retention, total amount donated through DAFs.
- Track and analyze your data annually.
- Adjust strategies based on data insights and donor feedback.

Examples of Nonprofits with Strong DAF Communication

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is an entity with extensive resources, but smaller organizations can take a similar approach. TNC's website includes a dedicated [DAF donation page](#) that provides clear guidance and an embedded widget that allows donors to initiate DAF gifts directly from this webpage. The page also features an impact story featuring a couple who gave to TNC through a DAF. They also have [resources directed at financial planners and advisors](#) who manage high-net-worth clients with DAFs.

EARTHDAY.ORG provides both information on an [individual donor webpage](#) and a widget through which a gift can be directed. It also provides the information required if someone wants to direct a DAF gift directly from the DAF holder's website.

DAF Day is a day created to build awareness about what DAFs do to support nonprofits and encourage people who have created DAFs to direct gifts through them. You can sign up for a free resource kit [here](#).

Is the majority of individual donations really being made online?

In terms of numbers of donations, yes. Currently, 63% of donors prefer to give online with a credit or debit card, followed by direct mail (16%), PayPal (10%), wire transfer (5%), cash (4%), digital wallet (1%), and text-to-give (1%). While 57% of nonprofit website traffic came from mobile devices, 75% of revenue came from desktop devices. These and other donation statistics can be found [here](#) via Double the Donation.

What is current thinking around physical (direct) mail campaigns?

Studies show that direct mail campaigns are still generating money for nonprofits, especially as part of an integrated marketing campaign, where prospective donors are receiving multi-channel requests. Open rates are better than electronic correspondence and polls show people have more trust in a physical piece of mail. Here are some sources to consider:

- [Association for Fundraising Professionals says do them if you have the capacity to do so.](#)
- [Why Direct Mail is Still an Effective Channel for Nonprofits](#) from Nonprofit Pro.
- [Younger generations think receiving direct mail is novel.](#)
- [Direct mail statistics based on 2022](#) including that, for every \$1.27 spent on direct mail, organizations saw returns of \$4.09.

Q2 Workshop: How to Unlock Donations from Corporations

How can an organization's board of directors best be looped into fundraising appeals? Examples would be really helpful!

Fundraising is a core responsibility of every board member. This expectation should be clearly communicated during board member recruitment and reinforced during each board member's onboarding, so that every board member understands they play a critical role in securing the resources that make the mission possible. Here are ways board members can actively support fundraising:

1. **Make a Personal, Annual Gift** - Every board member should make a personal, public annual financial contribution—ideally an unrestricted gift. It is essential to demonstrate 100% board participation, as some funders will not support organizations that can't show this commitment. If your nonprofit has a formal "give or get" policy, board members should fulfill it. Even small financial donations are important symbols of leadership and belief in the mission.
2. **Serve as Door Openers** - Board members play a crucial role in introducing new prospective donors. Encouraging them to make introductions within their personal and professional networks opens doors that staff may not have access to.
3. **Help Thank Donors Personally** - Board members should be regularly engaged in donor stewardship. Whether through a small number of handwritten notes or phone calls, this is important because it improves board members' understanding of the fundraising program, but also is a great stewardship touch that helps donor retention. This is not a thank you in lieu of an official acknowledgement, this is a thank you in addition to it. For ease of execution, assign board members donor thank-you tasks by month, tier, or portfolio.
4. **Understand and Support the Fundraising Strategy** - Board members should be educated on the organization's fundraising strategy, revenue mix, and which channels or donor types offer the best return on investment (ROI). This understanding enables better decision-making and advocacy.
5. **Be Visible Advocates for the Mission** - Encourage board members to promote your mission publicly. Regularly provide them talking points, impact stories, and social media messaging they can share, encourage them to list their board role on LinkedIn, and invite them to speak at events or accept awards on behalf of the organization.
6. **Support Cultivation and Stewardship Activities** - Board members can co-host or attend small cultivation events, attend donor appreciation events like site tours and receptions. Their presence adds credibility and relationship-building power to these moments.
7. **Attend and Support Fundraising Events** - Board members should attend key organizational events and bring guests. Some members may help with planning, logistics, or securing sponsors to add capacity to your team. Their attendance signals commitment and can help expand your community of supporters.
8. **Provide Board Members with Development Training and Peer Learning** - Provide annual fundraising training tailored for board members, ideally with examples of how

other board members have successfully contributed. Some boards also benefit from informal mentoring between seasoned and newer members.

9. **Participate in Solicitation, Where Appropriate** - Board members might assist with asks or make asks in close coordination with the ED or the Development Director, when appropriate. Not all board members will be comfortable with direct solicitation, but all should be trained to do so. Sometimes it is fitting for them to accompany staff to solicitation meetings. In cases where they have a relationship it can be effective for them to make personal notes on appeal letters, or send a ghostwritten ask. At a previous organization I worked for, our board chair (a former big tech CEO) made a well-prepared ask (it involved lots of coaching, lots of ghostwriting) to another former CEO of the same company, based on their shared history—which led to a transformational multi-year gift.
10. **Integrate Development into Board Meetings**

Include a standing agenda item at board meetings to report on fundraising progress, presenting a clear dashboard to show funds raised in different revenue streams. This helps normalize development conversations and keeps fundraising top-of-mind. You might even have a board development committee that board members rotate on and off of. Also, it is important to acknowledge board members' contributions to fundraising during meetings —whether it's through gifts (if the board donor allows public acknowledgement), introductions, or stewardship. This reinforces a culture of philanthropy and shared ownership of fundraising success.

While making a financial gift to the organization should not be optional for any board member, other methods of participation might be. You really need to let each member play to their own strengths, so it might be most effective to give them a menu of fundraising opportunities with options like “make five donor thank-you calls” “fill and host a table at the annual fundraising event,” “introduce three new prospective donors to the organization,” or “help organize the XYZ fundraising event.” But make it mandatory for them to select something. This gives board members flexibility based on their strengths and comfort levels.

Q3 Workshop: Level Up Your Year-End Fundraising

We've often tried peer-to-peer campaigns, recruiting champions to do outreach with their networks, and this has never really generated much in terms of participation. Do you have suggestions for effective peer-to-peer campaigns?

Here are some strategies to employ that might strengthen your next campaign:

- **Provide your champions with a specific goal, a deadline, and a clear call-to-action:** Specific targets and impact-driven language are motivating. For example, "By raising \$1000.00 for Neighbors Helping Neighbors House by December 31, 2025, you will help us provide 10 nights of housing for families in crisis".
- **Offer support by having a virtual champion kick-off and regular check-ins:** Host a brief virtual kick-off to outline expectations, share best practices, and answer questions. Follow up with short check-ins and automated reminders to keep momentum going. This also helps you identify and address potential issues early, and provide support and encouragement.
- **Provide a comprehensive toolkit:** Give your champions everything they need to put on a successful campaign (and keep messaging on-brand) by providing them with ready-to-use resources. This information can be stored in an online folder that you provide them with a link for. The toolkit can include email and social media templates/messages, hashtags, your social handles, compelling photos, approved graphics in a variety of electronic formats, key facts about your mission, and any guidelines.
- **Personalize communications:** Encourage your champions to share their personal stories, their connection to the mission, or a story related to the organization that moved them. Authentic testimonials resonate more deeply with donors than generic appeals.
- **Add elements of fun and friendly competition:** Gamify the experience with fundraising thermometers, leaderboards, or team challenges. This builds excitement and increases engagement.
- **Recognize and celebrate success:** Acknowledge champions throughout the campaign with public shoutouts, small, branded incentives, or special thank-you messages. Ongoing appreciation helps sustain enthusiasm.
- **Tie the effort to a theme or event:** Aligning your peer-to-peer campaign with an existing event, awareness day, or holiday provides a natural deadline and a reason to celebrate achievements together.

We often wonder if we should ask people who have given recently. For instance, we do our annual fundraising event in September. Is it OK to ask again as part of the fall appeal? Is it OK to ask recurring donors? What about people who give in November?

Yes, it's absolutely appropriate to ask recent donors again, and some will give again, so long as your messaging is thoughtful, timed appropriately, and acknowledges their prior support. Most don't mind being asked again when they feel recognized and appreciated for their previous donations. Here are some guidelines:

1. Always start by thanking them sincerely and referencing their past support.
2. If possible, segment these donors and tailor your messaging by type:
 - a. Event donors: Many event gifts are made out of social participation or inspiration from the moment. It's perfectly fine to include them in your fall or year-end appeal, especially if the follow-up reinforces the impact of the event and invites continued involvement. For example, "Thank you for your generous gift during our September event. You helped make an incredible impact. As we approach year-end, we invite you to consider another gift to help us finish the year strong."
 - b. Recurring donors: It's okay to occasionally invite recurring donors to upgrade or make an extra one-time contribution especially if there's a special opportunity, (like a match or a project to be funded that they might care about) or an urgent need.
 - c. Recent or November donors: You can include them in general year-end communications, but you might adjust your messaging to focus more on appreciation and impact than a direct ask. For example, "Your recent gift is already helping families this season. If you're inspired to do even more, your additional support before December 31 [will go twice as far thanks to our year-end match.] [will help get us over the finish line to our goal of \$_____.]"
3. Be mindful of donor fatigue: Research supports that people expect to receive multiple communications and appeals from an organization at year-end, especially in different formats (e.g. social appeals, direct mail, and email), and generally don't mind if messages are relevant and varied. That said, you know your donor community best. You might decide to exclude anyone who donated in the past 30 days from another solicitation, and instead send them a gratitude message or impact story. Also, keep an



eye on your unsubscribe rates and adjust the frequency or mix of your messaging if you start seeing more of your contacts opting out than normal.

You mentioned that disclaimer language should be included with an impact list that is presented to donors. Can you explain why this is important and what that disclaimer language should be?

An impact list should include disclaimer language to ensure transparency and maintain donor trust. When you share examples of what different gift amounts can accomplish, it's important to clarify that these are illustrative rather than guaranteed outcomes—unless you plan to use each donation exactly as stated. This protects your organization from being perceived as misleading and preserves flexibility to direct funds where they are most needed.

You can do this by adding a simple disclaimer, such as in the impact table below:

Gift Amount	Example Impact*
\$100	Provides seeds and starter plants for 5 families to grow their own vegetables.
\$250	Covers five cooking classes showing community members how to cook nutritious meals using garden produce.
\$500	Supports a season of supplies and support for a family garden plot.

**Funds are used to meet the organization's most pressing needs and make critical impacts possible, including those like the examples listed above.*