

TRENDS

2020

Nonprofit Communications  
TRENDS REPORT

#npcomm2020



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# THE GOOD NEWS & THE BAD NEWS

## What's New This Year

### The Bad News

- **Nonprofits are not adopting best practices for email engagement**, which could soon result in major failures in their ability to use email successfully. *See page 7 for details.*
- While still investing significant amounts of time on social media, **nonprofits are not widely adopting some of the approaches that create the most engagement**. *See page 10 for details.*
- While the communications workload continues to grow, the average **size of a nonprofit communications team has not grown** to keep pace. *See page 12 for details.*

### The Good News

- For the first time, we have data on the **priority objectives for nonprofit communications teams** to round out our previous research on the most common goals, strategies, and tactics. *See page 14 for details.*
- **Nonprofits are shifting their communications teams to more effective structures** like Integrated and Centralized Teams and away from less effective models like Internal Agencies and CEO-led Teams. *See page 18 for details.* And we continue to learn more about what makes teams effective.
- **Communications staff mostly feel valued and respected in their organizations.** The more senior you are and the more control you have over your workload, the more likely you are to feel that way. *See page 22 for details.*

### Other News

Nonprofit communicators also shared with us:

- Which **projects they like most and least**. *See page 24 for details.*
- What they think they could do to **improve their own productivity or effectiveness**, and **what colleagues could do to help them**. *See page 25 for details.*
- Which **professional skills** they would like to develop in 2020. *See page 26 for details.*



# Tweetable Findings

Share with #NPCOMM2020 and find more at <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Nonprofits are not adopting best practices for email engagement. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Workloads grow, but communications team sizes are staying the same size. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Nonprofits need to implement email list management best practices NOW or face their own email apocalypse. #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

A little over half of nonprofits are implementing email re-engagement campaigns, although they are often waiting too long to do them. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Only 28% of nonprofits send an email welcome series of 2 or more messages to new subscribers. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

69% of nonprofits NEVER stop emailing subscribers even if the subscriber is clearly no longer engaged. #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Social media posts by nonprofits are used to promote programs and include a direct call to action 45% of the time. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Only 30% of social media posts by nonprofits share inspirational stories or other uplifting content. #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

About half (53%) of nonprofits say they manage an active Facebook Group. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Only 17% of nonprofits say they actively encourage people to create Facebook Fundraisers for their nonprofits. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Just 13% of nonprofits say they live stream video at least monthly. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Less than half (42%) of nonprofits post to Instagram Stories at least weekly. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Most popular communications objectives for nonprofits: financial gains or savings (fundraising), people joining or subscribing, participation levels, and expression of loyalty. #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

On nearly every measure, Centralized and Integrated Communications Teams perform better than Internal Agency, CEO-Led, and Fundraising-Led Teams. #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Overall communications effectiveness held steady at 3.3 out of 5. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

81% of communications staff feel respected and valued by their supervisors. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Love it or hate it? Annual reports figured prominently on both the favorite and least favorite project lists! #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Nonprofit communicators are most excited about getting to do “new” things like new websites and new campaigns. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Nonprofit communicators wish colleagues would plan better, give more notice to communications staff about what's coming up, follow communications processes, respond to requests and meet deadlines. #NPCOMM2020 <http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

Nonprofit communicators want to develop social media management skills as well as improve video and graphic design skills. #NPCOMM2020  
<http://npmg.us/npccommtrendsreport>

# Where to Find Answers to Your Questions

If the data you are seeking isn't in this year's report, it's likely in reports from recent years.

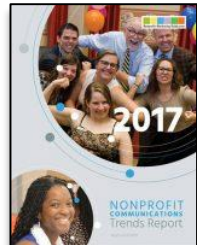
## In the 2020 Report (This One) . . .

- New data on nonprofit **communications objectives**
- New data on how nonprofits **manage their email lists**
- New data on how nonprofits are **engaging supporters on social media**
- Updated data on effective **communications team models**
- The types of skills nonprofit communicators **want to develop**



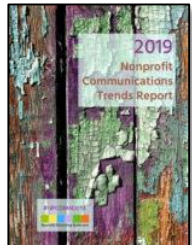
## In the 2017 Report . . .

- The four most popular models of **nonprofit communications teams and how they are structured**, including important differences
- Extensive data on how nonprofit communications teams can **measure their own effectiveness**
- Important differences in how **communications directors, development directors, and executive directors** view and approach communications work



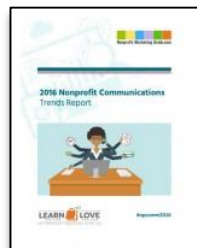
## In the 2019 Report . . .

- New data on priority level, experience and effectiveness for **12 marketing strategies**
- Updated data on **communications team sizes, structures, and budgets**
- Updated **communications team salaries**, including regional differences
- New data on **writing skills, annual report formats, and the use of video**
- New data on **organizational culture around communications work**



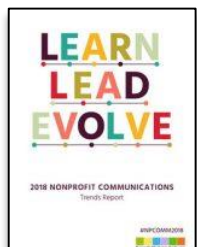
## In the 2016 Report . . .

- Which **communications channels are most important**
- What **gets in the way** of nonprofit communications success
- The **importance of a strong relationship with the executive director**
- **Advice for executive directors** on how to work more effectively with communications teams



## In the 2018 Report . . .

- **Effectiveness** on 12 specific communications goals
- **How much content** teams typically create
- How staff rate their **levels of expertise** on a dozen communications skills
- The **types of training** communications staff get and who pays for it
- **Demographic data** for nonprofit communications staff



## In the 2015 Report . . .

- The **points of conflict** in nonprofit communications
- Portrait of a **typical nonprofit communications director**



To get your own copy of these reports, register for a free membership at [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com).

# BAD NEWS

- The Nonprofit Email Apocalypse is coming
- Time on social media isn't spent on what's most engaging
- Communications staffing is stagnant





# THE LOOMING NONPROFIT EMAIL APOCALYPSE

## Email Engagement Practices Lagging

**Email deliverability and engagement are like the climate change of nonprofit communications: Half of the people are unaware or in denial about it and the other half aren't sure what to do or if their actions will make a difference.**

For the last several years, we've blogged and trained nonprofit communicators about the importance of monitoring email engagement – not just open and click-through rates on individual emails, but **how many people on your email list have opened at least one email within a set period time, such as the last three months.**

This year we decided to survey the extent to which nonprofits are implementing good email list management practices. The results are not good. **In fact, they are downright awful.**

We at Nonprofit Marketing Guide aren't "the sky is falling" alarmist types by nature. **But we're pulling the alarm on this one: If nonprofits don't start implementing email list management and engagement best practices, they will bring on their own personal email apocalypse.**

Nonprofits that ignore these best practices will soon find that what used to be an effective communications tool has become utterly unreliable and perhaps even useless.

Why? Because if you don't manage your email marketing for engagement, your deliverability will go down. That's the email jargon for "your emails will go straight to the spam folder." It's time to stop worrying about whether your subject line sounds spammy and start worrying about how you manage your mailing list.

We aren't the only ones sounding the alarm. EveryAction's 2019 Email Deliverability Study estimates that the nonprofit sector could be losing almost

\$100 million in donations because appeals are going into spam folders.

In its 2019 end-of-year fundraising season wrap-up, M+R reported that email deliverability was a big problem, with many nonprofits struggling to get their email appeals into inboxes. In their 2018 year-end analysis, they found that nonprofits who saw their list size drop year-over-year (because they actively managed their lists, dropping the unengaged) also saw better returns: a 26% improvement in response rate and a 2% improvement in email revenue.

**Email deliverability and engagement are like the climate change of nonprofit communications:** Half of the people are unaware or in denial about it and the other half aren't sure what to do or if their actions will make a difference.

It's time (actually it's past time, right now, in early 2020) to evaluate where you are and what you need to do. If you are already experiencing problems, you can repair the damage. But it takes a lot of time, energy and work to do so (more than managing for engagement in the first place) . . . and the results aren't guaranteed. And for anyone thinking that just switching to another email provider will solve your problems: think again. The heart of the problem is your list and how you manage it. Transferring bad habits to a new email provider won't work.

Now to the numbers . . .

In this year's survey, **74% of nonprofits said they send an email newsletter or update at least monthly.** That's the good news, and it stops there.

From M+R: <https://www.mrss.com/lab/am-i-normal-quick-trends-from-2019-end-of-year-fundraising-season/> and  
<https://www.mrss.com/lab/decluttering-for-deliverability-the-life-changing-magic-of-tidying-up-your-email-list/>  
From EveryAction: [https://go.everyaction.com/WC-2019-06-EmailDeliverability\\_LP.html](https://go.everyaction.com/WC-2019-06-EmailDeliverability_LP.html)

We asked nonprofits whether they implement several email engagement best practices, and less than a third of nonprofits said they did.

- Only 28% send an **email welcome series** of two or more messages to new subscribers.
- Only 32% have edited their email unsubscribe pages to allow people to **customize the kinds of email they get**.
- Only 13% of nonprofits have edited their email unsubscribe pages to allow people to **customize the frequency of the emails they get**.

## Nonprofits Largely Ignoring Email List Management Best Practices

**We also asked specifically about email list management best practices.** A basic tenet of email engagement and deliverability is to only mail people who demonstrate that they want your content by continuing to open it.

It doesn't take much to be considered "engaged." While there isn't a hard and fast rule at this time, most email service providers consider a subscriber engaged **if they have opened at least one email in the last 3-6 months.**

When a subscriber has stopped opening emails after a designated amount of time, you should send them a re-engagement series of emails to try to get them to open an email again. If they still don't open an email, you should stop emailing them (or at a minimum, limit the quantity of emails you send in the future.)

**We found very few nonprofits have adopted these best practices.**

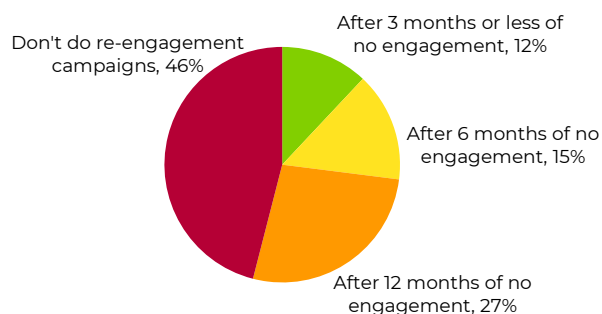
**A little over half of nonprofits are implementing email re-engagement campaigns, although they are often waiting too long to do them.**

We found that 12% of nonprofits consider someone unengaged at three months or less and therefore ready for a re-engagement campaign. Another 15% set this mark at six months, and 27% set it at 12 months. The remaining 46% of nonprofits surveyed do not send email re-engagement campaigns.

For those who do, their favorite re-engagement tactics are as follows in this order:

- Emotional or personal "we miss you" appeals
- Highlighting their best or most popular content
- Highlighting their newest content
- Telling subscribers they will be removed from the list unless they act
- Encouraging customization of preferences (e.g. email topics or frequency)

### At what point do you consider subscribers unengaged and ready for a re-engagement campaign?



## Few Nonprofits Are Embracing Email List Management Best Practices

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Do you send a Welcome Series to new subscribers?	28%	65%	7%
Does your unsubscribe page allow people to customize the types of emails they get?	32%	61%	8%
Does your unsubscribe page allow people to customize the frequency of emails they get?	13%	79%	8%

Based on responses from 625 nonprofit communicators



## Nonprofits Can't Stop, Won't Stop Emailing

Unfortunately, even some nonprofits who are running re-engagement campaigns stop there and fail to scale back or stop emailing unengaged subscribers.

A whopping **77% of nonprofits say that they never cut back** the quantity of emails they send to unengaged subscribers, with **69% saying they never stop emailing**, even if the subscriber is clearly no longer engaged.

This is incredibly dangerous behavior, thus our apocalyptic warnings.

Some nonprofits are trying, of course. But their standards for when to slow or stop emailing are far outside the email industry benchmark of three-six months.

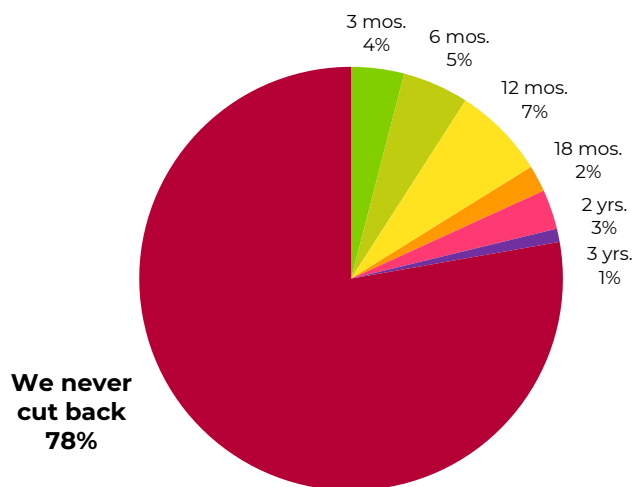
**Only 4% of nonprofits cut back sending after three months of no engagement, with another 5% cutting back at six months of no engagement.** Another 13% cut back at somewhere between one to three years.

Removing someone from the mailing list entirely is even harder for nonprofits to implement relatively quickly. **Just 4% of nonprofits said they would stop emailing someone entirely if they hadn't engaged in six months.**

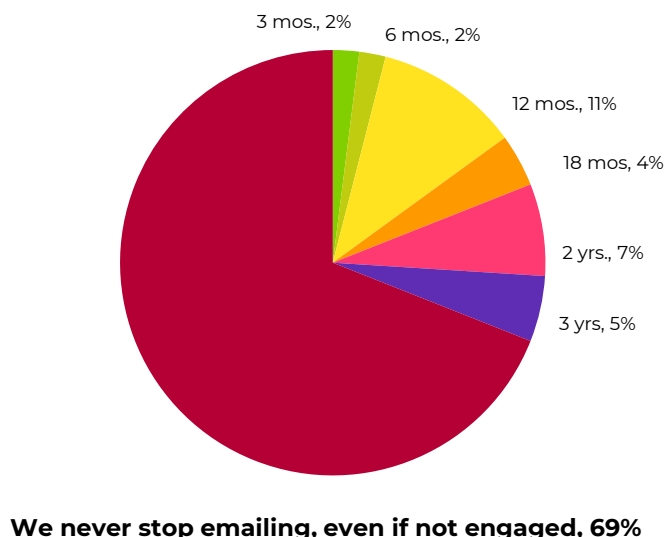
Eleven percent of nonprofits are using the 12-month mark, with another 16% stopping email at some point between 18 months and 3 years.

If you take nothing else from this year's report, remember this: **You must stop emailing people who never open your emails. Otherwise, you have no one to blame but yourself for causing your nonprofit's email apocalypse.**

When do you cut back how many emails you send someone? If they haven't engaged in . . .



When do you stop emailing people entirely? When they haven't engaged in . . .



Based on responses from 625 nonprofit communicators

# ARE NONPROFITS WASTING TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

## Nonprofits Slow to Adopt the Most Engaging Social Media Tactics

**Are nonprofits using the most engaging social media tactics consistently? The answer is, “Not really.”**

Our research from previous Trends Reports pinpoints **social media as the communications channel where nonprofits spend the most time but have the least confidence** in the value of that time spent.

Nonprofits fully understand the potential benefits of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media platforms. But the advice on how to achieve those benefits is very general, like “post engaging content.” Many nonprofits feel like they are at the mercy of good timing, sheer luck, or the mysterious and constantly changing algorithms to achieve results.

To help the sector decipher what's happening and what's working, we decided to start with the specific tactics that the social media companies (especially Facebook) are saying are the most engaging uses of their platforms.

**Are nonprofits using these most engaging social media tactics consistently? The answer is, “Not really.”**

We first asked nonprofits to estimate the percentage of their posts that fell into three categories:

- Direct calls to action like *donate*, *volunteer*, or *register*
- Informational or soft *learn more* calls to action
- Inspirational or uplifting content with no call to action

We were encouraged that nonprofits reported a nice mix. But are the proportions correct? That depends on a nonprofit's specific social media strategy. However, in general, we believe nonprofits should be posting more inspirational and uplifting content than they say they are.

### What percentage of your social media posts ...

0% 50% 100%

Promote your nonprofit or its programs and services and include a direct call to action (donate, volunteer, register, etc.)?

45%

Share news, ideas, or advice either with no call to action or a “learn more” type of ask?

42%

Share inspirational stories, quotes, or other uplifting content without a direct call to action?

30%

Average response from 625 nonprofit communicators

Next, we surveyed their use of the specific tactics that the social media platforms say are most engaging.

**About half (53%) of nonprofits say they manage an active Facebook Group.** Facebook is re-investing heavily into Groups and Mark Zuckerberg has said that he expects much of the future user activity on Facebook to take place in private Groups.

**Less than half (42%) of nonprofits post to Instagram Stories at least weekly.** Instagram Stories are the fastest growing social media format. Several social media industry insiders believe that the Stories format will soon overtake the more traditional Newsfeed format as the primary way people use social media.

**Only a quarter of nonprofits (25%) actively encourage communications via Facebook Messenger or a chat bot.** In addition to Groups, Facebook is also encouraging users to connect with brands via Messenger as a more private communications channel. Even if you don't use Messenger specifically, it's extremely likely that you'll need to use an instant messaging or chat program with supporters, and that will likely include a bot to help automate some of those conversations.

**Only 17% say they actively encourage people to create Facebook Fundraisers for their nonprofits.**

We see all of the problems with Facebook Fundraisers from the nonprofit's perspective. We hope Facebook will work with nonprofits to address some of those concerns. However, there is no arguing with the ease of giving for donors.

**Just 13% say they live stream video at least monthly.** Video posts are by far the most engaging content on social media, and live video streams are watched even longer than recorded videos.

These are the social media tactics that work and that the social media companies themselves are investing in and banking on to keep users coming back every day.

**If you are frustrated with lackluster results on social media, it's time to re-evaluate your strategy.**

**Consider going all in with at least one of these engaging tactics.**

## Implementation of Engaging Social Media Tactics by Nonprofits

	Yes	No	N/A
Does your nonprofit . . .			
Manage an active Facebook Group?	53%	45%	2%
Post to Instagram Stories at least weekly?	42%	48%	9%
Actively encourage communication with your nonprofit via Facebook Messenger or a chat bot?	25%	70%	5%
Actively encourage people to create Facebook Fundraisers for your nonprofit?	17%	75%	8%
Live stream video at least monthly?	13%	80%	7%

Based on responses from 625 nonprofit communicators

# THE WORK KEEPS GROWING, BUT TEAM SIZE DOESN'T

## Communications Team Sizes Stagnant

Nonprofit investment in communications staffing hasn't changed over the last five years, even as the workload continues to grow.

Since we started surveying about communications team size in 2015, we've seen very little change in how many full-time equivalents (FTE) nonprofits are devoting to communications.

Nonprofits reported the following average team sizes in 2019 based on overall organizational budget:

Under \$500,000	1 FTE
\$500,000 - \$1 million	1.3 FTE
\$1-5 million	1.8 FTE
\$5-20 million	2.5 FTE
\$20 million	3.75 FTE

### Communications Team Size as a Percentage of Overall Staff

Instead of using annual budget size exclusively, for many nonprofits, percentage of staff size devoted to communications is a better benchmark.

Smaller organizations with annual budgets **under \$1 million devote 21%** of their total staff FTE to communications.

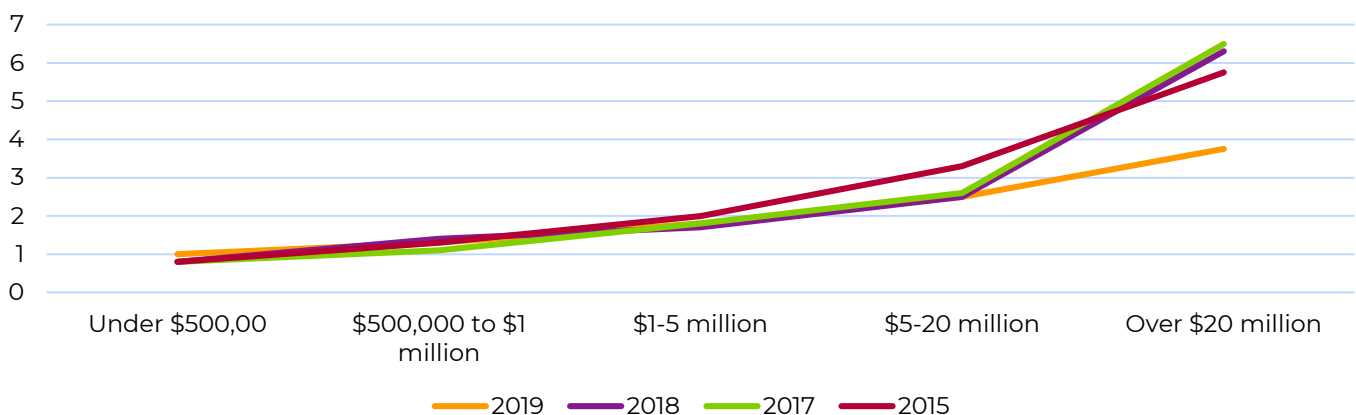
Mid-size organizations with annual budgets **between \$1 million and \$10 million devote 10%** of their total staff FTE to communications.

Larger organizations with annual budgets **above \$10 million devote 4%** of their total staff FTE to communications.

Source: 2017 Nonprofit Communications Trends Report

### Communications Team Sizes Are Not Growing

*Marketing or Communications FTE by Overall Organizational Budget*



# GOOD NEWS

- **New data on communications objectives**
- **The shift to more effective team models**
- **Value and respect for communications staff**

# WHAT DOES SUCCESS REALLY LOOK LIKE?

## Clarifying Communications Objectives

About half of nonprofit communications teams prioritize fundraising results. The other half of teams focus more on participation levels and change in knowledge or understanding of the issues.

### We've Researched Goals, Strategies, and Tactics ... What About Objectives?

For the first several years of the Nonprofit Communications Trends Report, we focused on **tactical** trends. But as the profession grew and the data needs of nonprofit communicators became more sophisticated, so did the Trends Report.

In the 2016 Trends Report, we started surveying **communications goals**, with a full survey on the 12 most common nonprofit communications goals in the 2017 Trends Report and team effectiveness on those goals in the 2018 Trends Report. In 2019, we surveyed for the first time specific **communications strategies**, such as permission-based marketing, content marketing, and event and experience-based marketing.

This year for the 2020 Trends Report, we added 12 **communications objectives** to the survey, rounding

out the research. Survey participants picked their top three objectives in no particular order from a list of a dozen choices. Out of 220 possible unique combinations, at least one participant chose 159 of the 220 (72% of the possible combinations)!

**This clearly demonstrates the diversity of purpose found in communications teams in the sector – as well as the challenge in prioritizing and focusing a strategy.**

As with many aspects of our research, the findings can change dramatically based on the extent to which the communications team is responsible for fundraising. Therefore, we analyzed the most popular trios of objectives based on whether they included Financial Gains or Savings (e.g. Fundraising Results) as one of the three choices.

If you communicate to fundraise, look at the combinations on page 16. If you aren't responsible for fundraising results, see the combinations on page 17.

### Most Popular Communications Objectives for Nonprofits

*Percentage Including the Objective in Their Top 3*

<b>Financial gains</b> or savings (e.g., fundraising results)	54%	<b>Levels of influence</b> (e.g., thought leadership)	20%
<b>Participation levels</b> (e.g., numbers registering or taking action)	42%	<b>Expressions of trust</b> in you by participants or supporters	18%
<b>Expression of loyalty</b> (e.g., donor retention or long-term engagement)	34%	<b>Increased readiness</b> or empowerment to take an action	16%
<b>Change in knowledge</b> or understanding about your issues	33%	<b>Increased satisfaction</b> among participants or supporters	16%
<b>People joining, subscribing, or following</b> (e.g., list growth)	33%	<b>Change in behavior</b> among certain groups of people	9%
<b>Increased demand or desire</b> (e.g., requests made for services)	20%	<b>Change in tone</b> or attitude about your issues	6%

Based on responses from 625 nonprofit communicators



# The Most Popular Trios of Objectives

Let's look at the most popular combinations of objectives and how they come together.

**Fifty-four percent (54%) of nonprofit communicators placed Financial Gains or Savings (e.g., Fundraising Results) in their Top 3 objectives.**

To this objective, they were most likely to add:

- People joining, subscribing, or following
- Participation levels (e.g., numbers registering or taking action)
- Expressions of loyalty (e.g., donor retention or long-term engagement)

There's a significant drop-off in popularity of other objectives, with the next most popular being

- Change in knowledge or understanding about issues
- Increased demand or desire (e.g., requests made for services)

**Forty-six percent (46%) of nonprofit communicators didn't select Financial Gains or Savings (e.g., Fundraising Results) in their Top 3 objectives.**

**Instead, they are focused primarily on Participation Levels and/or Change in Knowledge or Understanding about Issues.**

These objectives were followed by a much more diverse list to complete the trio. The following additional objectives were most popular, in order:

- People joining, subscribing, or following
- Expressions of loyalty (e.g., donor retention or long-term engagement)
- Levels of influence (e.g., thought leadership)
- Increased demand or desire (e.g., requests made for services)
- Expressions of trust in you by participants or supporters
- Increased readiness or empowerment to take an action
- Increased satisfaction among participants or supporters.

There's very little difference in objectives based on organization size, with one exception: Nonprofits with budgets of \$5 million and less are more likely to emphasize financial gains or savings than larger nonprofits.

## The Most Popular Goals, Strategies and Tactics to Combine with Your Objectives

Based on research from previous Nonprofit Communications Trends Reports, the most popular nonprofit communications **goals** are:

- Engaging our community
- Brand building and reputation management
- Raising awareness of our issues
- Supporting fundraising from small-medium donors
- Supporting event fundraising
- Supporting major donor fundraising

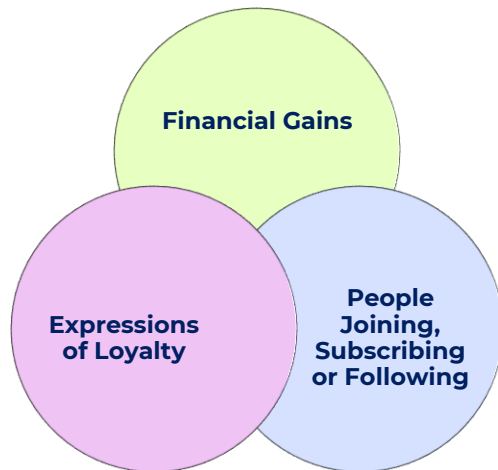
The most popular **strategies** are:

- Permission-based marketing
- Content marketing
- Event and experience marketing
- Relationship marketing

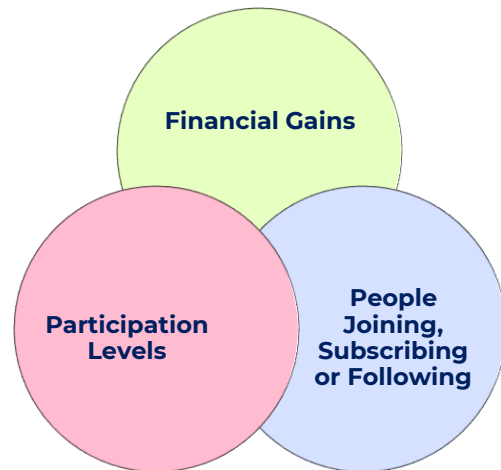
The most popular **tactics** are websites, email, social media, media relations/PR, in-person events, and direct mail.

You can review all of the Trends Reports with a free account at [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com) if you'd like additional details on the research behind these lists.

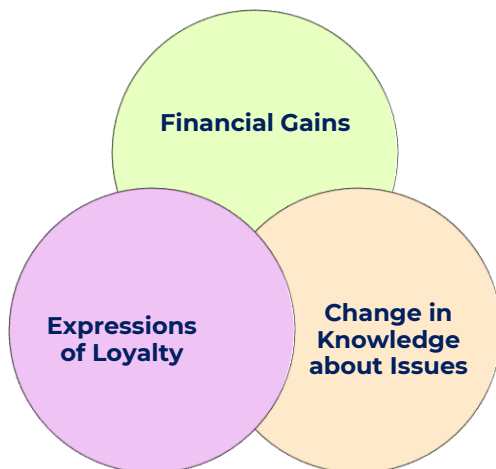
# Most Popular Combinations of Top Objectives That Include Fundraising



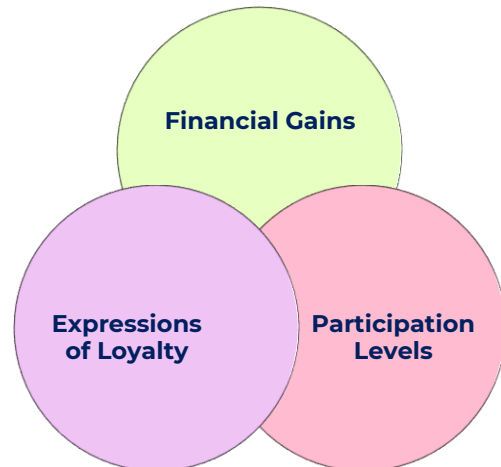
Representing 10% of fundraising combinations and 6% of all combinations



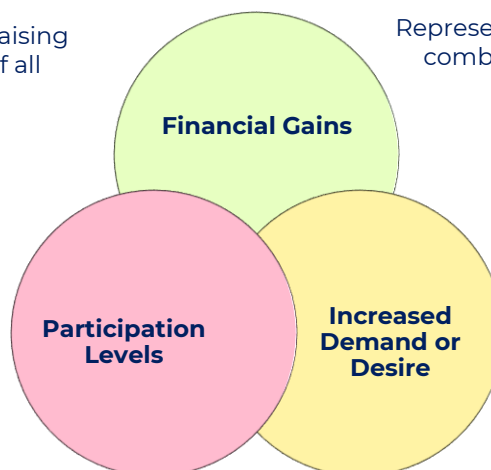
Representing 7% of fundraising combinations and 4% of all combinations



Representing 6% of fundraising combinations and 3% of all combinations

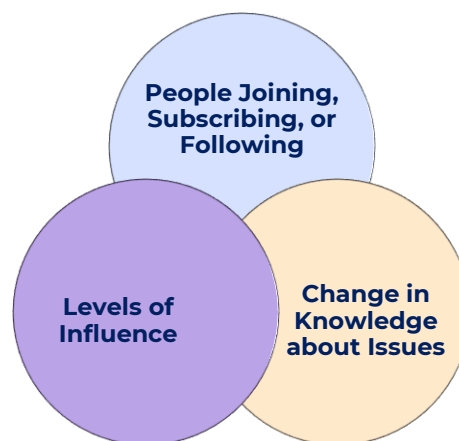
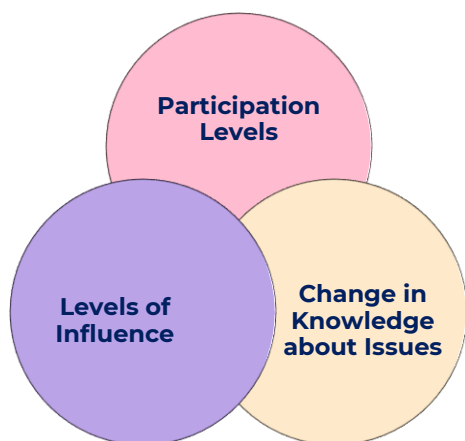
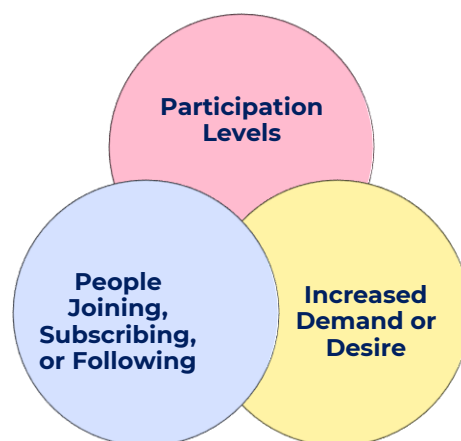


Representing 6% of fundraising combinations and 3% of all combinations



Representing 6% of fundraising combinations and 3% of all combinations

# Most Popular Combinations of Top Engagement Objectives (without Fundraising)



Because of the broad diversity in the engagement combinations, these trios each represent just 3% of all engagement combinations and less than 1% of all combinations. Nevertheless, they are the most popular combinations.



# MORE NONPROFITS UNDERSTAND THAT Comms Team Structure Matters

In 2019, 73% of the most effective nonprofit communications teams were organized as either Centralized or Integrated Teams.

## Centralized and Integrated Teams combined made up 62% of all nonprofit communications teams in 2019.

This is up significantly from 51% in 2018 and 38% in 2016. When looking only at the most effective nonprofit communicators, 73% are working as Centralized or Integrated Teams.

**Internal Agency Teams are trending down** in popularity from 18% in 2016 to 15% in 2018 and 2019. **CEO-Led Teams are trending down even more** from 19% in 2016, to 14% in 2018, to 12% in 2019. **Fundraising-Led Teams remain the least popular structure** for communications team, at just 7% in 2019.

## How to Choose Between the Two Most Effective Team Structures for Nonprofit Communicators

The two most effective team structures are **Centralized Teams**, where communications staff set the strategy and prioritize their workload with input from across the organization and **Integrated Teams**, where communications and fundraising staff jointly decide on communications goals and workload.

In addition to communications effectiveness, these two models excel in a variety of ways, including investments in professional development and implementation of communications best practices. They also excel in how valued and respected staff feel, overall job satisfaction, and positive working relationships with management.

The difference between the Centralized and Integrated Team models is primarily about goals and objectives.

**Is fundraising from individuals the driving goal behind most communications?** If yes, create an Integrated Team.


This team will work to fully integrate and balance other non-fundraising communications responsibilities with its primary fundraising goals.

When defining objectives, Integrated Teams are much more likely than Centralized Teams to prioritize financial gains or savings (e.g., fundraising results) and expressions of loyalty (e.g., donor retention rates).

**Or are individual fundraising goals on par with or secondary to other communications goals, such as community engagement and raising issue awareness, for example?** If yes, create a Centralized Team.

This team balances and prioritizes the needs of all parts of the organization. It unifies the nonprofit's editorial calendar and most effectively combines nonprofit strategic and tactical best practices across the organization.

When defining objectives, Centralized Teams may also work toward fundraising objectives, but are much more likely than Integrated Teams to prioritize participation levels (e.g., registering and taking action) and increasing demand or desire for programmatic services, for example.



On nearly every measure, Centralized and Integrated Teams perform better than Internal Agency, CEO-Led, and Fundraising-Led Teams.

## Centralized and Integrated Teams are More Effective

Team Model	Overall	Most Effective Teams	Somewhat Effective Teams	Least Effective Teams
Centralized	35%	45%	30%	23%
Integrated	27%	28%	28%	18%
Internal Agency	15%	10%	17%	20%
CEO-Led	12%	11%	12%	18%
Fundraising-Led	7%	4%	8%	8%

## Centralized and Integrated Teams Are More Likely to Implement Communications Best Practices

	Centralized	Integrated	Internal Agency	CEO-Led	Fundraising-Led
Sending an Email Newsletter at Least Monthly	83%	72%	68%	74%	64%
Posting to Instagram Stories at Least Weekly	43%	57%	37%	23%	26%

## Staff on Centralized and Integrated Teams Are More Likely to Feel Effective, Respected, and Valued

	Centralized	Integrated	Internal Agency	CEO-Led	Fundraising-Led
Staff Reporting That They Personally <b>Felt Very or Extremely Effective</b>	50%	40%	34%	30%	38%
'When I Speak up at Work, My <b>Opinion is Valued</b> ' -- Strongly Agree	41%	42%	19%	35%	40%
"I Feel Respected and Valued by My <b>Programmatic Colleagues</b> at My Nonprofit" -- Strongly Agree	38%	31%	18%	23%	29%
"I Feel Respected and Valued by My <b>Fundraising Colleagues</b> at My Nonprofit" -- Strongly Agree	37%	43%	24%	29%	48%
"I Feel Respected and Valued by My <b>Supervisor</b> at My Nonprofit" -- Strongly Agree	53%	48%	35%	34%	38%
"How Comfortable Do You Feel to <b>Disagree with the Decisions</b> Made by Your Supervisor?" -- Extremely Comfortable	21%	25%	12%	21%	12%
"My Nonprofit Enables Me to <b>Balance My Work and Personal Life</b> " -- Strongly Agree	76%	73%	65%	61%	64%



## The Problems with Other Team Structures

While communications success is possible in any team structure, we've found it's much harder for communications staff to be effective in the three other team structures we've studied.

**Internal Agency Teams.** The communications staff workload is determined by others who submit work request or needs.

These teams typically have very little say in communications strategy and are viewed as order takers. While team members can often enforce brand standards and tactical best practices as technical experts on graphic design and digital marketing, for example, they often have no recourse when asked to do work that conflicts with other organizational priorities.

The work of Internal Agency Teams frequently suffers because leaders within various parts of the organization fail to coordinate on communications strategy and editorial calendars at the executive level. This creates both conflict and many missed opportunities for internal collaboration and efficiency.

Internal Agency Team members typically feel isolated and less valued and respected by their programmatic and development co-workers and supervisors.

**CEO-Led Teams.** Communications staff work in service of top executives who determine the workload.

This team structure is most often found in smaller organizations with a single communications staff member who may only do communications part-time. It's also found in larger organizations with executive directors who either fail to delegate well or treat communications staff more like executive assistants.

The effectiveness of CEO-Led Team members suffers because they often feel like the direction they receive is constantly changing, with little strategic focus, consistency, or editorial planning.

CEO-Led communicators are much more likely to focus on list growth – people joining, subscribing, or following – than other team models (which is also consistent with smaller organizations).

**Fundraising-Led Teams.** Communications staff work in service of fundraising leaders who determine the

workload. Only 7% of communications teams in 2019 followed this model.

These communications staff often feel like all the non-fundraising communications – which can be significant – are dumped on them, but without leadership understanding or support for the work.

These staff members often feel like they are failing to meet the communications expectations of programmatic and executive leaders because they report to a development executive who minimizes those other requests in favor of fundraising goals. Development leaders also sometimes downplay the need for communications expertise on branding, community engagement, and issue awareness.

**All five team structures are found across the nonprofit sector regardless of size or mission.**

However, very small nonprofits are more likely than larger nonprofits to have a CEO-led team and the largest nonprofits (over \$20 million) are more likely than smaller nonprofits to have an Internal Agency team.

## Shifting to a More Effective Team Structure

In general, we recommend that Internal Agency Teams work on shifting toward the Centralized Team model. Fundraising-Led Teams should work toward becoming Integrated Teams. CEO-Led Teams can go either way depending on the balance between fundraising and other communications goals.

This transition is not just about your communications effectiveness. It's also about your staff satisfaction and retention. Staff on Centralized and Integrated Teams are more likely to say that they personally feel very or extremely effective in their work and are happier at work by several different measures.



Need help transitioning your team structure? Nonprofit Marketing Guide provides training and consulting services to help you create a more effective communications team.



# More Secrets of Effective Comms Teams

Great relationships full of trust and respect, combined with responsibility for and control over the workload, help create effective communications teams.



## Overall Effectiveness Remains Consistent

For the last few years, we've asked nonprofits to rank their **overall communications effectiveness** on a 5-star scale, from 1 star (not at all effective) to 5 stars (extremely effective). **The average was 3.3 stars, or between somewhat and very effective.** This is the same overall ranking as the last three years.

This year, we wanted to try to separate the person from the organization a bit, so we asked them to use the same scale to rate **how effective they personally felt in their communications job** in 2019. The results were very similar, **with a 3.3 average.**

## Qualities of the Most Effective Teams

To help find the secrets of successful teams, in this report we refer to the "Most Effective" and "Less Effective" nonprofits. "Most Effective" are those nonprofits who ranked themselves as Very or Extremely Effective. "Less Effective" are those who ranked themselves at Somewhat, Slightly, or Not at All Effective.

Here are a few conclusions about the **most effective teams** from this year's research:

**TEAM SIZE:** We see a big leap in effectiveness when nonprofits dedicate a full FTE (one full-time staff person) to communications work (as opposed to relying on part-time help). We see another big jump when the team reaches three FTE.

**TEAM STRUCTURE:** As discussed earlier in this report, the most effective nonprofits organize their communications work into either Centralized or Integrated Teams.

**RESPONSIBILITY and CONTROL:** The most effective communications teams say they feel "completely" responsible for managing various channels such as their website, email and social media, instead of feeling "mostly" or "somewhat" responsible.

**IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES:** The most effective teams are more likely to say they are implementing the social media and email best practices we included in the survey.

**WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE:** Nearly half (49%) of the most effective teams say employees in their nonprofits willingly accept change, compared to just 35% at less effective nonprofits.

**OPINIONS ARE VALUED:** Fully 90% of the most effective teams say when they speak up at work, their opinions are valued. That drops to 78% for less effective organizations.

**MUTUAL RESPECT.** The most effective teams are much more likely to say they "strongly agree" that their colleagues respect and value them. For example, 44% strongly agree that their programmatic colleagues value them, which drops to just 22% for less effective organizations. 55% strongly agree that their supervisors value them, which drops to 38% for less effective teams. Conversely, 31% of the most effective teams say they have "a great deal of trust" in the supervisor's ability to make good communications decisions, which falls to just 19% in less effective teams.



# Working Relationships for Most Communications Professionals Are Good

## Is Your Expertise Valued, Trusted, and Respected?

In the 2019 Trends Report, we asked if participants agreed with this statement: "My expertise as a communications/marketing professional is valued, trusted, and respected by others in my nonprofit."

At that time, 70% agreed. Amongst the most effective organizations, 84% agreed that their expertise was valued, trusted, and respected. That fell to just 61% at the less effective nonprofits.

For this year's report, we asked a similar question but decided to look at the data by departments.

Overall, communications staff do feel respected by their colleagues:

- 81% feel respected and valued by their supervisors.
- 74% feel respected and valued by programmatic colleagues.
- 70% feel respected and valued by development colleagues.

However, when you compare how communications staff answered these questions to how executive leadership, development, and combined communications and development staff answered, we most often see communications staff falling below their colleagues in feeling respected and valued.

While this is good news overall, there's still definitely room for improvement.

## Get a Customized Training Plan for Your Communications Effectiveness Level

We've identified five levels of professional development for nonprofit communicators, or what we call the Five Levels of Communications Effectiveness. These levels are backed up by 10 years of data from our annual Trends Reports and our experience coaching communications directors for more than a decade.

Once you know your level, you can focus on the training and skill development that best matches your needs at this point in your career.

Some online courses available right now:

- Creating a Re-Engagement Campaign
- Creating an Email Welcome Series
- Social Media Basics
- Content Marketing Basics
- 20 Days to More Powerful Writing
- 15 Days to More Inspiring, Engaging Email Newsletters
- Understanding Communications Measurement Frameworks

You can find your level by taking a super fast 2-question quiz and then adjust if needed. Just visit [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com](https://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com) and click on the "Take the Quiz" button to get started. It's free!

Become a free member and get access to these self-paced online courses, free e-books, tip sheets and more. You'll also get our Weekly Tips email with new insights and the five things you need to know each week.

# OTILLER NEWS

- Most and least favorite projects
- How to improve productivity and effectiveness
- Professional development goals



We found it amusing that annual reports figured prominently on both the favorite and least favorite lists! Those who claimed it as a favorite were mostly excited about trying a shorter format. Those who count it as their least favorite were doing long, traditional reports.



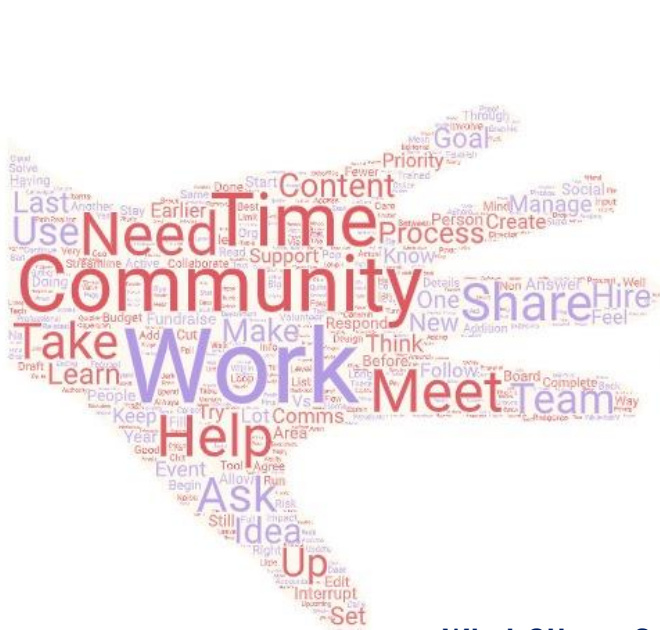
# Increasing Productivity and Effectiveness

We asked nonprofit communicators what they could do to increase their own productivity or effectiveness. Most of the comments fall into the category of workload management: planning more, getting organized, setting aside time for strategic priorities, eliminating distractions, and improving skills. We train nonprofit communicators how to improve in these areas through our “CALM not BUSY” work.

Next, we asked what others in their nonprofits could do to help communications staff increase their productivity or effectiveness. Most of these comments fall into the categories of internal communications and collaboration: colleagues should plan ahead more and give more notice to communications staff about what’s coming up, follow plans and communications processes, respond to requests and meet deadlines, etc.



## Improving Your Own Effectiveness



## What Others Can Do to Help You



# Professional Development Goals for 2020

We also asked nonprofit communicators to list three professional skills they would like to develop in the next year.

Social media management topped the list: As we have discussed in the report, nonprofit communicators often feel like they are not getting the results they hope for given the amount of time they spend on social media.

We also saw increased interest in improving video and graphic design skills, as well as writing and storytelling skills.

Communicators also want to improve their management and analysis skills.



## Skills Nonprofit Communicators Want to Develop in 2020





# About the Trends Survey

This report is based on an online survey by Nonprofit Marketing Guide during November 2019. The survey was administered using SurveyMonkey.com, with additional statistical analysis by MarketSight.com.

Participants were recruited 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.

The full survey was completed by 625 participants, and only completed surveys were used in the analysis. All 625 participants said they spend at least 50% of their time on communications or marketing work at their nonprofit organizations.

85% of participants are in the United States, 10% are in Canada, and the remainder are from other nations around the world.

Participants work for organizations of all sizes: 31% have annual budgets under \$1 million, 32% have budgets between \$1 million and \$5 million, and 29% have budgets over \$5 million. The others were unsure. This is virtually identical to the demographics of surveys in previous years.

## Areas of Responsibility

- 59% work only on communications/marketing
- 24% work on communications and development
- 8% work only on development
- 7% work on operations or executive leadership

## Job Level within the Organization

- 57% are middle managers or directors
- 23% are executives, c-suite, or senior managers
- 16% are coordinators or junior staffers

## Combining Job Levels and Responsibilities

- 37% are Communications Directors
- 13% are Communications and Development Directors
- 11% are Communications Coordinators
- 8% are Communications Executives
- 7% are Communications and Development Executives

If you'd like to suggest questions for next year's Trends Report Survey, send an email to [helpdesk@nonprofitmarketingguide.com](mailto:helpdesk@nonprofitmarketingguide.com) with "2021 Trends Survey" in the subject line.



## WE CAN HELP YOU Learn Your Job and Love Your Job

**At Nonprofit Marketing Guide, we are devoted to helping nonprofit communications staff like you learn your jobs AND love your jobs!**

**Daily Blog and Weekly E-Newsletter.**

Free. Stay up to date on best practices in our industry, find helpful resources and more.

**Learning Center.** Free. Enroll in self-paced online courses customized to your experience level and download more free resources like this report.

**A La Carte Training.** We host several webinars each month. You can register a la carte to attend only what you need most.

**All-Access Training Pass.** If you are interested in ongoing, consistent professional development and a community of other communications directors, consider an All-Access Pass.

Includes frequent webinars, exclusive self-paced online courses, marketing time-savers, private Facebook community, and other exclusives. Pay annually and save thousands over a la carte pricing.

**Communications Director Mentoring Program.** The ultimate six-month professional development program for nonprofit communications directors. January–June and July–December sessions. Includes the All-Access Pass.

