HOW TO USE DATA TO TAKE YOUR FUNDRAISING TO NEW HEIGHTS

The nonprofit's guide to analyzing, using, and cleaning data to improve fundraising results

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INTRODUCTION

Taking your online fundraising to the next level is easier than you might think. By gathering, analyzing, and using data from your past campaigns, you can uncover trends and find new opportunities to improve your fundraising results.

In this guide, you'll learn some simple yet highly effective ways to boost your online fundraising. These approaches can be used for all kinds of online fundraising efforts related to everything from capital campaigns and annual giving campaigns to auctions, galas, peer-to-peer fundraising, and advocacy campaigns.

Read on for tips on how to:

- Approach your data reporting and analysis
- Analyze your online fundraising campaigns
- Use data to improve your campaigns
- Keep your donor data clean and ready to put to work

Let's get started.

DETERMINING YOUR APPROACH TO DATA REPORTING & ANALYSIS

It can be tempting to jump right into planning your next online fundraising campaign or event. You might even want to take a "copy and paste" approach – simply re-doing what you did with your last campaign – to save time and hassle.

But before you start, it's important to take time for data analysis. Pausing to review your data can help you uncover trends, understand what's working and what's not, and find new opportunities to improve your fundraising results.

Of course, to analyze your data, you need to access it from your online fundraising platform. But even before you set up reports in your platform, think about your approach. For example:

- What are your data analysis goals?
- What data will inform your analysis?
- How will you access that data and put it to use?

Here are three ideas to consider as you determine your approach to data analysis and reporting:

1 **Campaign/event focus** – Think about what metrics are most important to your specific campaign or event. Then, set up your online fundraising platform to track year-over-year results for these metrics.

For example, if you're running a peer-to-peer fundraising event, if the number of registered participants is down one week compared with the same time the previous year, consider offering a discount code for a few weeks to encourage participants to register. If total funds raised is down, then offer participants tips and examples from participants who have been successful in the past.

In this case, some important data to include in your dashboards and reports might be:

- Number of participants
- Number of donors
- Total funds raised
- Number of teams
- Average team size
- Average donation size
- Average number of donations per participant
- Number of $0 donation participants

2

Sponsor focus – Providing potential sponsors with data from your past events or campaigns can demonstrate the value of a sponsorship from their perspective. For example, show them demographic data – such as gender, age, income level, and interests of your past event attendees. This approach goes a long way toward showing them that the sponsorship will get their name in front of the audience they want to reach.

TIP

Gathering demographic data can be tricky. Asking for too much information initially can turn people off. Instead, send follow-up surveys to gather additional information after participants or attendees have registered or donors have given. Also, consider purchasing data enhancement services from a third party. Then, pull the data into reports that can be shared with potential sponsors.

3

Organizational focus – Take a step back from your campaign or event and look at opportunities to engage your constituents to support your fundraising efforts. For example, identify event attendees who are involved with your organization in at least one other way (such as volunteering or activism). Since these are among your most involved supporters, consider asking them for additional support in ways they have not engaged yet, such as becoming a peer-to-peer fundraiser or making a donation.

Once you've determined what data you want to access and what you will do with it, then it's time to access it from your online fundraising platform. Some ideas:

- Set up dashboards in your online fundraising software for a visual representation that can help you monitor trends quickly and effectively on a daily basis.
- Build tabular reports of information to help with more detailed analysis.
- Ensure that staff members across your organization are reviewing and using the most recent dashboards and reports. Also, make sure your dashboards and reports represent the appropriate campaign objectives for each stakeholder group.
- Consider augmenting your data with wealth screening and predictive analytics services like iWave, Donor Search, or others to expand your constituent information beyond what you've collected.

ANALYZING YOUR ONLINE FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

There's a lot that goes into pulling off great online fundraising campaigns and events. One aspect that doesn't always get the attention it deserves is campaign analysis.

There are multiple reasons why taking time to analyze your campaign or event is worthwhile:

- It helps you track how your campaign is doing so you can make adjustments and improvements along the way.
- It tells you how well the campaign performed against your goals.
- It puts benchmark data in place that you can use to improve future fundraising campaigns.

TIP

If you identify specific changes you'd like to make, do just one or two at a time, so you get a true idea of the impact of the change.

So, where do you start?

Here are five tips for analyzing your online fundraising campaigns:

1 Analyze while the campaign is running.

Don't wait until the campaign or event is over to begin analyzing it. Review your campaign's status on a regular (weekly and monthly) basis.

If you've already thought about what metrics are most important to your campaign or event and set up your online fundraising platform to track these metrics (as mentioned in the previous section of this guide), then you've got what you need to analyze your campaign.

So now, for example here's how you might perform analysis while the campaign is running: If the number of donations in your fundraising campaign or registrations for your gala or golf event are down one week compared with the same point in the previous campaign, you might review your communications and send a special message to past donors or participants thanking them for their previous involvement (with personalized content specific to them, if possible) and asking them to get involved again.

2

Gather numbers after the campaign or event.

Once all of your donations are entered, run final reports for the goals and quantitative metrics you set before starting your campaign. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How did the campaign/event results compare with the goals you set?
- What goals were too low or too high, and why do you think that was the case?
- How effective were your various marketing efforts?

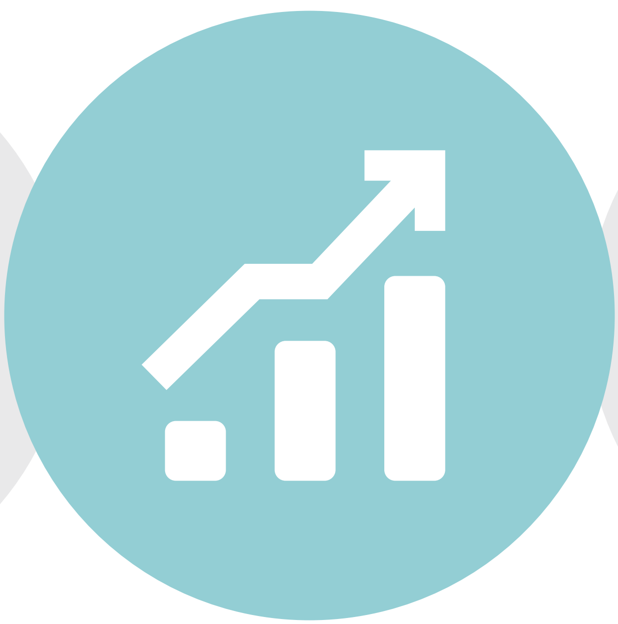
Look for metrics including total participants and/or donors, total funds raised, number of returning participants and/or donors, and average fundraising per participant and/or donor. Plus, dig deeper to find trends, such as amount raised based on registration or donation date, number of emails sent, and whether someone updated their personal or team fundraising page.

3

Look at other success factors.

Just as important as the numbers are the qualitative aspects of a campaign or event. Be sure to listen and respond to feedback throughout the campaign or event. And, send a post-campaign survey to various audiences involved to determine:

- How much staff effort did it take?
- What did participants, attendees, and donors like/dislike about the campaign or event: registering, fundraising, giving, and the campaign/event itself?
- Were the campaign website and fundraising tools easy to use for participants, donors, and staff?



4

Debrief with your campaign team.

Bring together everyone on your staff who was involved with the campaign to review your original campaign goals, discuss campaign results, and consider lessons learned. Be sure to take notes so you'll have them to look back on as you start work on your next campaign.

5

Start thinking about the next campaign.

Once you have another campaign under your belt and data to show your results, you can start thinking strategically about your next campaign. Some things to consider:

- If your campaign wasn't as successful as you'd like, maybe changing the timing, messaging, or structure of the campaign would help.
- If your campaign met your goals and you're going to continue with the same format, perhaps your focus for the next campaign can be to raise more by making sure you aren't leaving money on the table.
- If fundraising was a huge success, maybe your strategy next time can be to focus on recruiting more sponsors, attracting more peer-to-peer participants, or getting more donors to donate again and at an even higher level.

It's well worth it to take time to analyze your fundraising campaigns. Gathering and studying data, as well as being receptive to feedback from staff and constituents, will go a long way toward making your campaigns the best they can be.

TIP

Evaluating your data is important, but you can spend weeks analyzing it and not actually get anything done. So, be sure to identify and focus on the metrics that are most relevant to your campaign.

USING DATA TO IMPROVE YOUR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

You've pulled data from past campaigns. You've analyzed it. Now it's time to think about specific ways to put it to work for your next campaigns.

Here are 10 ways to use your data to improve your future fundraising efforts:

1 Decide when to start.

Dig into past years' campaign or event data to find out when event attendees and/or participants registered or when donors contributed. Consider timing a multichannel approach to coincide with when your biggest supporters and donors typically engage so that you can use their enthusiasm as a point for launching registration or fundraising asks.

2 Determine where to focus your resources.

When possible, use source codes in your online fundraising efforts so that you can attribute registrants and donors to specific marketing channels. This will help you decide which channels are worth keeping (and possibly putting more resources toward), and which you should leave behind.

3 Target your email audience.

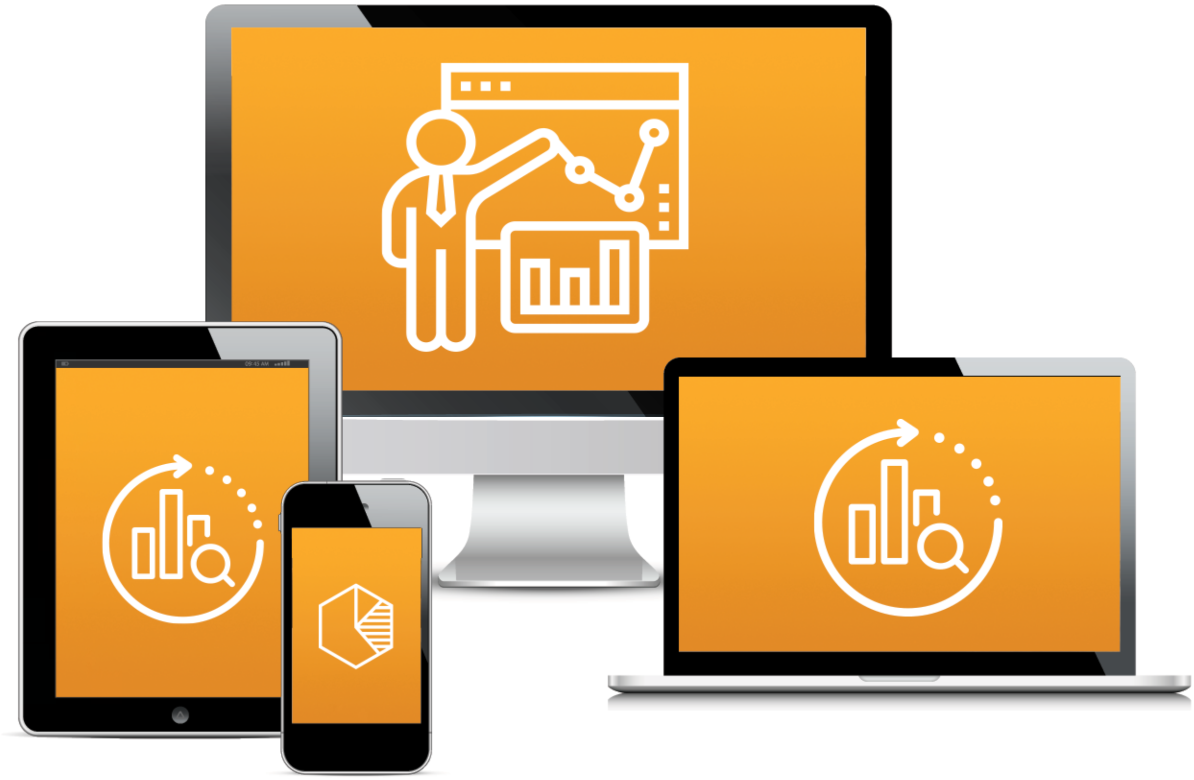
Send more personal and targeted emails by segmenting your audiences (for example, non-donors vs. existing donors) and customizing messages based on their interaction with your organization. Be sure your messages address people in ways that make sense. This doesn't have to be complicated but, for example, if someone just gave, you should either suppress them from the email or talk to them differently than you would talk with someone who hasn't donated recently.

Also, use data from previous campaigns or events to add personalized notes to your emails. This approach can help you tap into the loyalty of past donors. For example, look up your previous years' results, and add a personal note to your email, such as:

- "Thank you for [donating/fundraising] $X last year."
- "Thank you for being one of our top XX [donors/fundraisers] last year."
- "Last year you ran X:XX in our 5K and took Xth place. Are you ready to do it again?"

4 Make your campaign more compelling.

Organizations often include basic messages about past campaigns in their emails, such as, "Last year, we had X attendees and raised $X." Take this a step further by adding more compelling data from your past campaign to motivate more people to participate and raise even more funds. For example, "Last year we raised $X million dollars. With that money we were able to fund XX research grants. So far, those grants have produced XXX hours in the lab, which resulted in X new clinical trials set to launch in Q1 2023."



5 Check your ask levels.

Make sure that the ask levels on your donation forms make the most sense. For example, if the average gift is higher than the first two or three options, consider increasing the levels to encourage larger donations.

6 Use dynamic asks.

Use your online fundraising and constituent relationship management (CRM) tools to automatically specify ask levels based on each donor's previous donation level. For example, if a donor previously donated $20, you might start your ask levels for that donor at $20 or even $25. For one that donated $50, you might start there, or even bump it up to $60.

7 Tie dollars to real items.

Associate the donation levels for your campaign or event with what the funds will provide for your organization. For example, letting supporters know that their donation will help feed a family of four or send a child to school for a year is more impactful than simply asking for a specified amount of money.

8 Reconsider incentives for peer-to-peer fundraisers.

If you're running a peer-to-peer campaign and offer fundraising incentives or use milestone badges, look up your levels to see how many participants are reaching them. If many people are falling short of your lowest tier, you might want to lower it. Or you might test more effective communications to encourage participants to reach the goals. On the other hand, if it seems that too many people are quickly reaching your lowest tier, consider raising it.

9 Improve the event day experience.

If an event is at the heart of your fundraising campaign, collect and record data from your event day to improve future event day experiences. For example, did you have a photo booth that was booked solid? If so, consider adding another photo booth next year. Did your post-event silent auction raise significant funds last time? If so, consider adding more items this time.

10 Decide if your campaign or event is still working for you.

Define what success means to your organization. For example: number of people, fundraising dollars, or net revenue; then review data from your campaigns to ensure you want to continue them. You just might find that it's time to try a new campaign.

KEEPING YOUR DONOR DATA CLEAN AND READY TO USE

Your donor data might just be your most valuable asset. It powers your fundraising efforts, drives your donor communications, and feeds your reports. Shouldn't it be complete, accurate, and in tip-top shape?

Here are six ways to keep your donor data clean and ready to put to work:

1 Think about who needs what data and why.

Various people in your organization have different needs for different information. Think about each role in your organization. Write down what information they need to see and for what purpose. This will help you to understand which data points are important to collect and keep updated and easily accessible. For example:

- Board members – These are often "numbers" people. They typically want to see that their investment of time and dollars is generating results. So, they generally want the bottom line. For example, they usually do well with visual reports showing key performance metrics, goals, and the organization's progress toward reaching those goals.
- Development team – These folks need to be able to track the donors they're working with. They need to stay current on donor interactions and stewardship as well as know when they have a new prospective donor. They need to be able to demonstrate that they're working toward fundraising goals. Therefore, they need data that tells them:
    - Are they making connections with donors and potential donors?
    - Are they moving constituents toward a closer relationship with the organization?
    - What results is the organization seeing from those relationships?
    - Are these things all happening in a timely manner?
- Donors – These supporters want to be spoken with accurately, about topics they're interested in, and in their preferred method of communication. No donor wants to donate to a specific cause and then receive solicitations for something completely irrelevant. They don't want to see a lot of paper mail if they prefer communicating electronically. They want accurate receipts and communications. That's why it is important to track information such as where the donor is giving, how they are giving, how much they've given, and what prompted them to give.

2

Decide how often to clean your data.

It's important to run data integrity queries (DIQs) in your fundraising software. A DIQ can be anything from queries looking for missing data points to queries looking for emails with no @ sign or zip codes not in the five + four format.

You should run DIQs frequently enough that they don't pile up and become overwhelming. At the same time, you don't want to run them so often that there are only a few records to update and it's not worth the time.

How often you update your data will depend on your specific organization's needs. Start by running DIQs each week. Then move to every two weeks, then once per month, etc., until you find the right frequency for your organization.

You may also want to run one-off DIQs. For example, if you have a large or important direct mailing going out, you may want to run a DIQ before pulling the mailing list to ensure you have the most current information possible.

3

Review your data tables, queries, reports, and exports.

It's important to periodically review data tables, queries, reports, and exports, etc. You should periodically review your data tables (data in spreadsheet/tabular form) and inactivate any incorrect table entries. Then use a query to find and delete these table entries from constituent records so they can ultimately be deleted from the tables.

Periodically review your query file. Look for global changes that are more than 30 days old and notify the owner of the file to remove the changes (or follow your organization's policy on this). You should also review queries to see if you have any that have not been run in the past 12 months and notify the owner; ask if the queries should be removed or maybe put in an archive folder. Repeat this exercise with reports and exports.

4

Update your database policies.

Plan to review your policies and procedures at least once each year to make sure the information is still accurate. Be sure that your policies and procedures include consistent naming standards for campaigns, events, queries, exports, etc. to make searching and reporting easier and more accurate.

Any time you change a policy or procedure, be sure to notify the entire organization. Let them know the details of what has been changed and why it's been modified. This will help them understand the importance of the change and its impact on the organization.

5

Keep staff members well educated.

You may find that as you run DIQs, you see consistent data integrity issues. Those issues are a signal that you may need to re-train your database administration staff on policies. You also may need to update your data entry procedures manual to ensure directions are clear and correct.

6

Revisit your staff onboarding checklist.

As staff members join your organization, it's important to have a comprehensive checklist to ensure the security of your data and make sure new staff members have the tools they need to do their jobs. A few items to consider for your checklist:

- Determine what data permissions/access they'll need to do their jobs, and set them up in the system.
- Provide them with user names and passwords for system and program access.
- Schedule a training session with them to go over policies and procedures.

START USING YOUR DATA TO BOOST YOUR FUNDRAISING RESULTS.

Collecting, analyzing, cleaning, and using data might seem overwhelming. But it's critically important to ensure your fundraising success.

Many online fundraising and marketing tools will support the tactics in this guide. At Cathexis Partners, we help nonprofits like yours use technology to raise funds and spread the word about their missions more effectively and more efficiently. If you have questions or would like help setting up the approaches in this guide for your organization, contact Cathexis Partners today:

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