



Crafting a Communications Plan for Your Crowdfunding Campaign



About CauseVox

CauseVox is a crowdfunding and peer-to-peer fundraising platform for nonprofits and social good projects.

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Introduction

Behind every great crowdfunding campaign should be a great communications plan. With the pressure on small nonprofits growing higher every day as they compete for the attention of prospective donors, it's more important than ever to craft a communications strategy to fit your mission, fundraising goals, and audience.

Whether you are raising money to fight cancer, to give kids access to healthy foods, or to support victims of domestic abuse, you have a story to tell, and technology has given us many ways to tell it. In turn, we have more opportunities to reach more people, inspire more action, and achieve better results.

This eBook will lay out the building blocks of a communications plan for your nonprofit crowdfunding campaign, and break down the steps you should take at each stage: before, during, and at the end. We'll also provide ideas to put into action for several communications mediums, which hopefully will inspire you as you create your plan.



The Foundation of Communications



The Foundation of Communications

Laying Out The Building Blocks

To get started on your plan, make sure you know the basics about your crowdfunding campaign first – it will determine your communications strategy and tactics.

Map out the following elements on a whiteboard or piece of paper before you create a communications plan:





Knowing these basics is the first step before doing anything else. If you need help to figure out some of the details, check out the following resources:

- Creating a Fundraising Goal
- Community Building for Crowdfunding (Audience)
- Communications Timing for Crowdfunding
- Working with Partners and Brands
- ► Theory of Change (via NonprofitMarketingGuide.com)

There may be a few more elements that come into play, so make sure your communications team is working in tandem with your fundraising and program teams so everyone is on the same page about the goals and needs for your campaign.



Taking Inventory of Your Resources

Once you've determined the major elements of the crowdfunding campaign, it's time to take stock of what communications tools are available and what you may need to add to achieve your goals. To get you started, here's a list of common communication resources to consider using as you craft your plan:

People Resources	Content Resources	Channel Resources
Nonprofit Leadership & Board	• Written	• Blogs
• Partners	Photos	• Email
People You've Impacted	Videos	• Print (direct mail,
• Celebrities	• Events	publications)
• Staff	Art & Graphics	• Social Media
• Personal Fundraisers &	Audio	• TV
Community		• Radio
• Experts & Spokespeople		Events

Again, this list isn't exhaustive – but it should help you easily see where the gaps are and what you need support with, before you move forward with your plan.



Now, dig a little deeper and answer these questions to help you determine your communications capacity and needs. Keep in mind that each campaign may have different answers, because one size doesn't fit all.

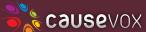
- Do we already have content crafted or do we need to create new content?
- Do we have capacity in-house for public relations or do we need to outsource?
- What social media channels can we use, and do we need to add anything?
- ► Can we get support from partners for content creation and distribution?
- Who can we ask to be a voice for the campaign (ambassadors, celebrity champions)?
- ► What do we need from our program teams to tell the story?

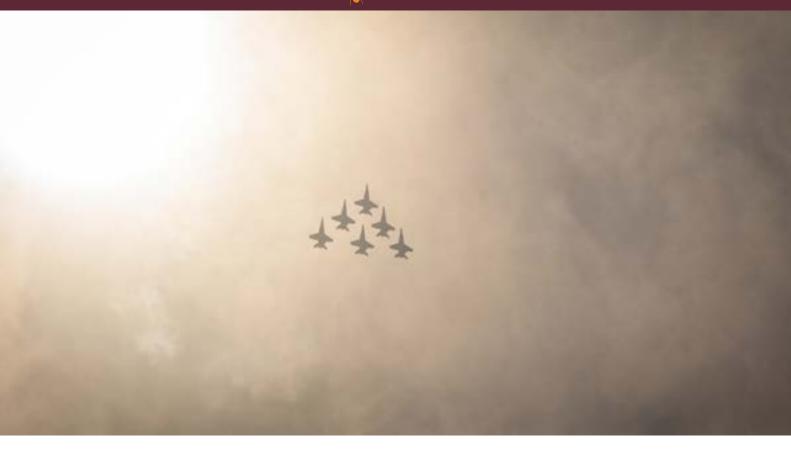
Look at your answers – what do they tell you? If you need bigger reach to new audiences, you may want to get some help with media placement or leverage an advocacy site like Change.org or Care2. Or if photos are going to be your main storytelling tool, you may choose to set up an Instagram account or hire a photographer.

Knowing ahead of time what you have and what you need will help you be more strategic about your plan, and may even alter your initial ideas. It's much better to know now than to scramble later when time is short and resources are stretched.



Campaign Launch Communications Plan





Campaign Launch Communications Plan

Be Prepared

A little planning goes a long way, and we know from experience that even the smallest amount of preparation can make all the difference in a crowdfunding campaign. It's like setting your clothes out the night before a big interview, or preparing meals for the week on Sundays – you feel more relaxed, and you can focus on the big picture and other important priorities as they happen.



Many communications and program teams work from a project plan, or create calendars and spreadsheets where tasks are arranged by team member and due date. Knowing the order of when to "push things live" and who is handling it is essential. For instance, you don't want to send out your email blast or post to Facebook if your donation page isn't even live yet!

The CauseVox team knows the importance of project management to get things done, and you and your team should use tools that work best for you. Even if you write all of your checklists out by hand, you will be better prepared for organizing and launching your communications plan than if you tried to remember it all in your head.

Here's a checklist of possible communications items to create and manage in advance of launch day – some may be crossed off a week or more in advance, and some may be down to the very last minute, so use the calendar and work backwards from the launch date, giving you and your team plenty of time to complete the tasks.

Launch Day Initial Communications:

- ▶ Blog posts announcing campaign with a call-to-action (internal and external)
- ► Email blast to kickoff the campaign
- ► Campaign web pages and banners
- Donation pages
- Social media posts (at least 3-4 for each platform)



Press:

- Targeted media pitch list (reporters, bloggers)
- Approved campaign language, spokespeople quotes, photos, and videos (See our guide to <u>publicity for crowdfunding campaigns</u>)
- Press release
- Pitch email or phone script
- Interview availability for key spokespeople, staff, partners, or champions

Partners & Champions:

- Sample language to use in their own promotions (blog post, social media, etc.)
- Tracking links for web page, donation, or ad referrals
- Custom donation page
- ▶ Logos, approved language, quotes, bios, boilerplates, and links
- Custom banner ads or badges and partner page

Metrics:

- Create reporting funnels for donations or other actions
- List of goals and key performance indicators (KPI)
- ▶ Set up social media tracking for hastags, other engagement
- ▶ Affirm reporting schedule and specifics for partner metrics



Anybody Know What Day It Is?

Let's take stock of where we are: you have your campaign details, you've taken inventory of your resources, and you've made a list of your communications needs for launch. But before we get into the messaging itself, there's another really important piece of a campaign launch to factor in: did you check the calendar?

Before 24-hour news cycles and holidays like National Chocolate Ice Cream Day were invented, you could launch a fundraising appeal on any day of the week and be sure that people would see your message. But now there are best practices around the timing of launching major marketing and fundraising campaigns to ensure you're clear of significant conflicts, and to maximize your message and impact.

When picking a campaign launch date, check the schedule for:

- National holidays and observances
- ▶ Key vacation times (Spring Break, end of summer tends to be bad, etc.)
- Other scheduled fundraising campaign, event, or program at your organization
- Partner commitments
- Major themes and seasons (sports, back to school)
- Cause-related days or activities appropriate for your campaign (think Earth Day, or Giving Tuesday).



To get even more specific, here are three examples of working with a calendar to time your campaign launch and communications:

- A breast cancer awareness organization running a campaign in October, which is Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- An education nonprofit launching a campaign at the end of August in time for the start of school
- An animal organization scheduling a campaign to align with their partner's (a major pet goods retailer) calendar

You should also be ready to put your campaign on hold in times of major national news, crisis, and disaster, unless your cause has appropriate relevance. Too many established brands and nonprofits alike have made the mistake of ignoring these moments, or forcing their way into the conversation, only to frustrate, anger, or hurt their communities. What may be appropriate for a disaster aid organization may not be for a nonprofit focused on literacy. Smart communications sometimes means knowing when not to say anything at all.

Lastly, trends from the last few years show that nonprofits see more success when launching appeals on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. But be sure to check against your own benchmarks and past campaign reports to hone in the right day – for you, it could be a weekend!

You can learn more about communications and campaign timing on our blog.



The Message

So far, we've talked a lot about planning but we haven't discussed the communications message itself. What exactly should you be communicating when you first launch a crowdfunding campaign? There is no hard and fast rule, and every nonprofit campaign is different, but we believe there is a clear path to follow when crafting your first message:



Seems simple, right? That's because it is and it should be.

Even if your cause has been around for years, and it seems like a really obvious ask, it's still important to set up a full experience for a potential donor. Sure, there are some people who only need a link to your donate page and they're ready to go, but for others, they need to be pulled in by an interesting story, image, or fact, they need to be educated on the issue, and then they need clear direction to take action.

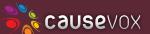


You can compare this to a news program: before the end of a segment or early in the evening, they'll tease out a story to come later, with an intriguing headline or a few seconds of video. The whole idea is that they want you to stay tuned to find out the full story. So you wait to watch, but before they get to the good stuff, they have to give you background, so you know what's going on. Then they go in for the big news, perhaps with an action item for viewers at home.

Whether you launch your campaign with an email, a video, a microsite, or all of the above, keep in mind that you must educate, tell a story, and inspire action all in one. Don't shortcut it – first impressions are everything.



Campaign Operating Communications Plan





Campaign Operating Communications Plan

Let's fast-forward a few days. The launch went smoothly, and you've already received your first wave of donations and engagement, perhaps some nice media mentions.

Now you have to keep the momentum going. Whether your campaign lasts just a couple of weeks, or you have two months left, the story continues, and so do your communications. Key elements for this round include:



This is a chance to tell another angle of your story, to use a different medium to compel action, and to let your audience know what's happened so far. And of course, you want to continue with your call-to-action to raise more funds for the campaign.



The Message

Stories on TV, film, and in books have new developments as time goes on, and watchers and readers need to be updated. The same goes for your campaign and communications – this isn't set it and forget it. Here's what should be included in this stage of your communications:

- **Email blast to your list:** It may include updates, relevant news or announcements, or a human interest story. It should definitely include the call-to-action (fundraising appeal) again.
- Donor acknowledgement: Any online donations should receive an automated thank you email with transaction information (CauseVox lets you customize this), and a secondary call-to-action (learn more, read a story, share on social media). Thank major gift donors with a phone call or personal note.
- **Blog post and/or website updates:** On your CauseVox campaign site blog, write a short update on the campaign with a call-to-action. Update any relevant content on your website with donation numbers and news.
- Social media: Highlight partners and champions, link to other campaign content like blog posts, videos, and photos, share donation totals, and recruit new donors.
- **Press:** Check in with interested media with any big updates on your campaign. Send an updated pitch to a secondary target list.
- Partners: Check in with partners and spokespeople, and update them on your progress. Gather any new content or updates from them to use in your outgoing communications.



Campaign updates aren't just about how much money you've raised to date. Use some of these suggestions for inspiration:

- An anonymous donor wants to do a matching gift campaign: send an email with a sense of urgency
- Your campaign was picked up by a major news outlet or TV show: post to social media and ask your community to share
- You're already close to your fundraising goal: increase the goal and use a new story to inspire donations
- A new major partner has come on board
- You're launching a supplemental action: a contest or sweepstakes

An important thing to remember when communicating during this time is to be strategic about where you post updates, and how frequently. Some require another email to the list, but some may be more suitable for Twitter. Others may work well on your blog or as a new banner on your homepage.

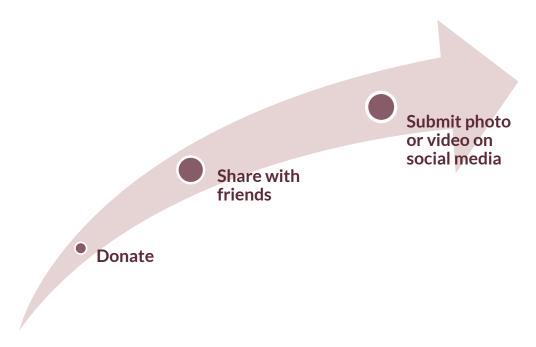
Think through your entire calendar for the campaign – avoid bombarding your audience with frequent messaging if you have a longer campaign (more than a month), and schedule communications to allow for other things that may come up. This is where a communications team's flexibility, ability to be proactive, and react quickly comes into play.



Your Donors Aren't Done

A classic mistake nonprofits make is to ignore donors who already contributed to a campaign, and only focus on prospective donors. But you shouldn't stop communicating with them – you still need them, and they still need to hear from you.

This is a chance to bring people up the engagement ladder, and to experiment with new communications tactics. Here's a sample action path for donors:



The easiest way to keep donors engaged with your nonprofit crowdfunding campaign after they've made a gift is to ask them to share the campaign with friends or family on social media or by email. All thank you pages and thank you email auto-responders should include a link to share the campaign online, potentially with a sample Tweet or Facebook post.



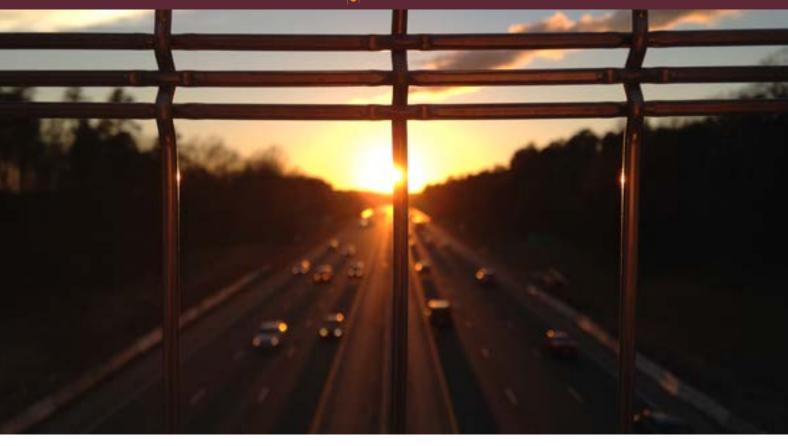
You may not have the capacity to really segment your audience and create unique action paths for all of them. If that's the case, you should still use your communications tools to encourage opportunities for action, and to deepen your relationship with your supporters. Try these tactics:

- Respond to people who Tweet at you or share your campaign on Facebook. Say thanks, and provide a link for another action.
- Include a secondary action in donor thank you notes: share an exclusive photo gallery, extra entries for a sweepstakes, or a discount on goods your org sells.
- Read comments on your blog posts and in response to your email blasts. If you can, write back and respond to questions, feedback, or concerns. This goes a long way.



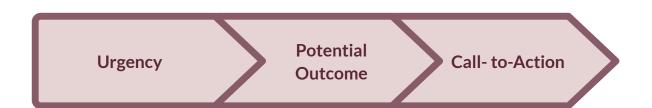
Campaign End Communications Plan





Campaign End Communications Plan

Whether your crowdfunding campaign is set to end because you've reached your goal, you're about to hit a deadline, or you need to move on to another campaign, this part requires it's own set of messaging and tactics, too.





At this point, your communications should have a tone of urgency and excitement to drive action:

"Only two days left to help us give all the dogs of North County shelter before winter!"

or

"Donate by 2pm tomorrow to unlock the matching gift!"

Supplement this urgency and the call-to-action by reminding people what the potential outcome once the campaign is over: If the library will stay open if you meet your goal, make that clear in your final email. If 100 families will get Thanksgiving dinner if you raise \$10,000, tug at heartstrings with photos and use relevant hashtags to get more reach on Twitter.

Just as in the middle of the campaign we talked about changing the story point of view, try closing your communications with a yet another point of view – someone positively impacted through your organization. Here are some examples:

- A homeless person who now has their own apartment
- A woman who adopted a dog from your shelter
- A high school dropout who went back to school and graduated
- A cancer survivor who completed a race/walk

Combine these personal stories with your final fundraising ask via email or a blog post. Best practices show that fundraising appeals coming from an individual perform better than those from an organization – a personal story usually always wins.



There are some final steps to take as you count down to the end, and all of your communications should reflect this stage of the campaign. Here's what you should be doing right now:

- **Email:** Send a final fundraising appeal to your list. Think urgency, think outcomes, think impact. Stick to one call-to-action and don't veer off topic or squeeze in other content unrelated to the campaign.
- Corporate website: Continue the urgency here, with an updated homepage banner or ticker reflecting the deadline and goal.
- **Campaign site:** Refresh your fundraising appeal and video to reflect the last days of your campaign. Post updates to your campaign site, too.
- Social media: Amp up the frequency of your Tweets and Facebook posts for the last few days. If you have the budget, use advertising dollars to promote relevant posts to get more reach. Ask everyone to keep sharing the campaign with their networks.
- **Press:** Follow up with reporters to prep them for the coming results.
- ▶ **Partners:** Touch base to confirm their efforts for the final push. Discuss the plan to communicate results to donors and the public.



After The Campaign: Reporting Results





After The Campaign: Reporting Results

Phew! Your crowdfunding campaign is closed and you reached your goal – or maybe you didn't. Either way, you're not quite finished communicating with your audience. Now you have to tell everyone the results of the campaign.

One of the biggest complaints nonprofits hear from donors is that there isn't enough follow up after a fundraising campaign. New metrics dashboards and analytics tools have made it easy to collect and analyze results quickly and efficiently, and to communicate them within hours or days.

This may be the most crucial time to keep your community informed. Think of how you'd feel if you'd been hearing a friend talk for months about a big goal he was working towards, and then when the day came and went, you heard nothing? You'd be confused, perhaps annoyed, or even left out of the loop. The same goes for your supporters – they want to know what happened with the campaign!

Much of the nitty gritty of your reporting data will be internal only – the general public is usually not going to read spreadsheets with details on numbers of new donors, the average donation size, etc. But there are some standard results they expect to see, and that you should relay:



- ▶ Did you reach your fundraising goal? Did you go over? Come up short?
- How many people donated?
- What will the money fund?
- ▶ When will it be put to use?

Once you've pulled the data, you need to communicate it in an easy to understand format, in a timely manner. Generally, you shouldn't wait more than a few days to publicize results, and if you can do so even sooner, you should strive for that.

Here's what your final communications checklist should include:

- ▶ **Email:** Within a few days of the campaign closing, email your entire list (not just donors) with the major results of the campaign, thanking them for their support, and explaining the impact they've made. As appropriate, include photos, video, or some great quotes to emphasize success.
 - If you have the ability to customize content in your email platform, include a specific acknowledgement to donors.
 - If you did not reach your goal, maintain a positive attitude, show gratitude, and talk about next steps to achieve success.
- ▶ **Blog/Website:** Update your homepage banner with the final results or a big thank you. Also update your campaign page and write up a new blog post with more details.



- Social media: Send out multiple Tweets, Facebook posts, and other updates with the results and acknowledgements. Be sure to give special shout outs to partners and key champions and supporters. Share relevant media mentions.
- Press: Prepare new quotes from spokespeople. Follow up first with all reporters who already did a piece on your campaign, and determine if the results are worthy of a release or targeted email blast.
- Partners: As soon as possible after you have the results, send an email to all partners and champions with the data, and request their own if they were tracking. Also:
 - Thank them for their support
 - Collect any approved quotes to be used in media
 - Discuss follow up communications from both sides

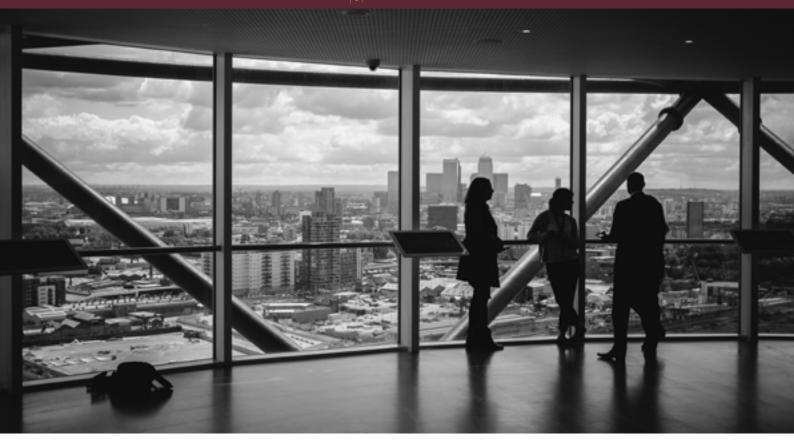
Nonprofits are becoming more creative and personal when thanking their community. You could make a fun video from your team, send out a few handwritten notes, or create a snazzy graphic for your website and social media. Get more ideas on how to thank your donors on our blog.

Read our blog post on a few other actions to wrap up your crowdfunding campaign.



New Tools, New Audiences





New Tools, New Audiences

Now that you've gone through all the stages of crafting a communications plan for your crowdfunding campaign, we want to dig a little deeper into some of the various tools and how you can use them for storytelling and messaging.

The first stories were passed on by word of mouth, from generation to generation. Then they were drawn in the dirt and on caves, and on papyrus and pottery, before appearing in print. Then we had radio and TV, and then communications exploded even more with the Internet.

Every day, new apps and gadgets and mediums are launched with the focus of telling your story better – more quickly, more visually, and more widely. Moreover, just as brands are expanding their consumer base, nonprofits are finding ways to reach younger supporters and cultivate relationships with super activists, all while engaging with the so-called "slacktivists" and everyday do-gooders.



The Medium Is The Message

A picture is worth a thousand words, but a Tweet maxes out at 140 characters. An email might get buried in an inbox, but a handwritten letter may be treasured forever.

We may always be reminded that the story itself is most important, but at the same time, human behavior and media consumption statistics prove what you use to tell the story can be just as important – if not more so – than the message itself.

Here are a few ideas and things to consider when determining what communications tools to use:

Blog

A 2013 study showed that nonprofit website traffic was down 14% from 2011 to 2012. But people are still looking for good content. New platforms like Medium are competing with WordPress and Tumblr to highlight great writing, and to let your story shine. But people have short attention spans and they've become used to skimming through aggregated headlines and excerpts, so creativity and context is key.

- Chunk out content using lists, Q & A interviews, and bullet points.
- Think "exclusive": behind the scenes, sneak peek, and special look.
- Create a series and give people a reason to come back. "To be continued..." works here, too, not just for your favorite TV show.
- Invite guest authors and crowdsource content. Ask your community for input on a particular topic or to answer a question, and publish the results.





Video

Video has been king of content for a few years now. More than 4 billion hours of video are viewed on YouTube each month alone. According to a 2013 benchmarks study by See3, YouTube, and Edelman, 80% of nonprofits want to use video even more to help with communications, fundraising, and advocacy – but budget, staff resources, and lack of clarity around ROI are big barriers.

But with apps like Vine and Instagram offering options to create and distribute short video in real-time, and smartphones making it easier than ever to record, edit, and share video within minutes, it's not as much of a burden on nonprofits as it used to be.

- ▶ 30-second videos of your org's team behind the scenes.
- Person on the street interviews (it still works on late night shows and the news!).
- Animated video to show the process from a donation to impact.
- Turn a dry topic into something fun or sexy (i.e. PBS' Mister Rogers and Bob Ross remixes).
- ► See some of our favorite examples of <u>testimonial videos</u>.





Photos & Art

Like video, billions of photos are uploaded and shared on the Internet each day, and apps like Snapchat and Instagram have made everyone an amateur photographer. Nonprofits are jumping into the meme game and adding funny captions to their photos, creating huge trends and action campaigns around associated https://doi.org/10.1001/japaches.2007/ and even getting artsy with filters and animation. Some of the most creative and fun nonprofit campaigns these days start with photos.

- Hold caption contests for some of your most unique, powerful, or funny images.
- Ask people to take a photo that "matches" one of your org posts each day, and the best ones could win prizes. Goes well with a matching donation campaign.
- Create a virtual yearbook of people involved with your organization, complete with class photos and senior superlatives. Send printed versions signed with notes from your staff to special donors and champions.
- Start a Snapchat Stories series with volunteers and staff, or offer Snapchat exclusive sneak peeks to donors.



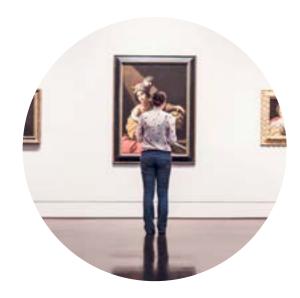


Audio

Perhaps one of the most neglected elements of storytelling is sound. But children first learn stories through spoken word, on TV, in person, or through books on tape. And many enduring public radio programs are much beloved because of the sound effects and radio voices (Think Car Talk and Prairie Home Companion). Most importantly, using audio as a storytelling device is almost always free!

- Create a weekly or monthly podcast featuring staff members, people your campaign impacts, and donors and supporters. <u>Here</u> are some of Wild Apricot's favorites.
- Record 10-second clips of pure audio background at a place your org does work. Like CBS Sunday Morning's moment of nature, just for sound.
- If your org sends a team to the scene after a natural disaster, or your homeless shelter is extra busy during a snowstorm, use that opportunity to call in (or record on your smartphone) a 1-2 minute update about the situation.
- Use voice-overs with fun characters as an add-on to a photo slideshow or cartoon strip.





Print

Despite what the naysayers are declaring, print is not dead. Long live print! Although newspaper and magazine circulations are steadily declining, people still read physical copies of the publications they love. And for every movement, there is a counter-movement. So tech lovers and tech haters alike are sitting down to write snail mail, bang out blog posts on typewriters first, and smudging their fingers reading The New York Times before checking their email.

Don't relegate all of your print communications to direct mail fundraising appeals. Take inspiration from why YOU love print and apply it to your cause.

- Send handwritten notes whenever you send swag to supporters.
- Start a pen pal campaign between donors and the people your organization supports.
- If you make infographics or other art online, print out a limited quantity and send printed versions to super activists to use as a poster.
- Pick some of your favorite blog posts or stories from your campaign and design a 1-4 page special edition newspaper or magazine for high-level donors and partners.





Social Media

The majority of nonprofits are using some sort of social media these days, whether it's Facebook, Twitter, Google+, or other. As with other mediums, it's getting harder for nonprofits to find reach and get the engagement they want among the buzz of billions of other posts. Once again, it pays to be creative, and to use social in unique ways, focusing on how short, timely communications and storytelling can lead supporters to action.

Try this:

- Allow one of your super activists to take over your Twitter feed for a day to field questions and spread awareness.
- Use Instagram to post as-it-happens moments behind the scenes at your campaign.
- Encourage people to frequently visit your Facebook page as you share one piece of a story at a time throughout a day, like a photo series in installments, or by using "To be continued..." cliffhangers.
- ► Host Google + Hangouts with surprise guests, or have a contest to pick a supporter to join a Hangout with a celebrity champion or advocate.

If you need more inspiration to create your story, download our free eBook on Hollywood Storylines for Nonprofit Crowdfunding.



Communicate to Activate





Communicate to Activate

There is no end to the possibilities of how you communicate about your cause. No matter the advances in technology, we believe cause communications is founded on the same best practices that have worked for years: strong storytelling, clear calls to action, and a willingness to experiment with different tactics and techniques.

We hope this eBook is helpful as you get started for the first time, or if you just needed a refresher on the basics. For additional resources, sign up for the <u>CauseVox blog</u>.



Use CauseVox for Crowdfunding





Use CauseVox For Storytelling

CauseVox is a crowdfunding and peer-to-peer fundraising platform for nonprofits and social good projects. We have powerful tools to help you reach new donors and new audiences. A few of our features include:

- Fully customizable fundraising site to integrate with your branding and design.
- Blogging tools to help you use content and stories as a way to drive traffic and donations.
- Personal and team fundraising pages so your supporters can use their own story to help you fundraise.
- Free guides, toolkits, case studies and resources, in addition to our frequently updated blog to help you be as successful as possible.

Ready to use storytelling to power your crowdfunding campaign? <u>Sign up on CauseVox today.</u>



www.causevox.com