

## Nonprofit Donor Engagement Benchmark Study

Insights into donor  
engagement behavior  
and preferences

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2012, Charity Dynamics and NTEN partnered to develop a first-of-its-kind donor engagement survey. Charity Dynamics and NTEN feel this study is critically important today, given the rapid rate at which donor engagement is evolving. The results of the study are astounding. Nonprofits that establish themselves as a donor's favorite charity are more likely to receive greater support from them – not just in terms of cash contributions, but also through volunteering, event participation, and issue advocacy.

The survey considers the self-reported behavior of 1,022 people who donated to a nonprofit in the past 12 months. Participants were asked how they prefer to engage with the nonprofits they support. The survey probed deeply to understand how people preferred to donate, volunteer, and support nonprofits across traditional and digital media.

The results of the survey provide valuable insight into how donors engage with charities in general as well as the significantly higher levels with which they engage with their favorite (or #1) charity.

- **Donation Concentration:** Most donors (78%) give to more than one charity. Nearly half of the survey respondents (47%) give a majority of their annual total donation amount to the charity to which they feel most connected.

- **Fundraisers:** Nearly a third (30%) of respondents indicated they fundraise on behalf of the charity they're most involved with at least once a year. 18% do this activity several times a year or more.
- **Preferred Media:** Respondents who are involved with their favorite charity prefer to find out information about the organization and its programs on its Web site (36%), via email (28%) and Facebook (6%).
- **Engagement Activities:** Respondents supported their favorite charity using digital media to participate in engagement activities ranging from donating to volunteering to spreading the word about their favorite charity.
- **Demographic Differences:** Among respondents, age was a significant indicator of the media and devices through which donors preferred to support and interact with their favorite charity.

These findings show that, while supporters may donate to multiple charities in a given year, they are likely to become more engaged with a single organization. They also are likely to do more than send money – they can become champions for your cause.

In the pages that follow, this report summarizes raw findings and provides recommendations for how nonprofits can use them to make good strategic and tactical decisions for their donor engagement programs.

## 2. KEY FINDINGS

Charity Dynamics and NTEEN administered the survey to nearly 2,000 US consumers who were randomly selected through an online recruitment service. Within this group, 1,022 participants donated at least once in the last twelve months (at least \$25) to at least one nonprofit. Responses from these “donors” were considered for all of the results presented below.

A description of the methodology has been included in Appendix A.

### 2.1 BENCHMARKS: CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Donors were asked to describe the number of nonprofits to which they donate in general as well as the degree to which they engage their favorite charity.

#### The vast majority of donors gave to multiple charities.

A majority of donors (78%) reported giving to more than one charity. This number remained consistent across demographic groups of age, gender, income and education. A small number of donors (12%) gave to seven or more nonprofits. These “7+ donors” were found across income brackets but tended to be older and from households with relatively higher incomes.

#### 75% of donors gave \$100 or more in the last 12 months.

Donors we’re asked how much they gave in the last 12 months to all charities combined. Respondents demonstrated an even distribution of annual gift amount, across all donation levels. Roughly 14% of donors gave at each level. A large portion of donors (75%), reported that they gave \$100 or more in the last 12 months. Donors’ annual contribution amount to all nonprofits was distributed evenly across the universe of participants.

Age groups 30-70+ gave the most, with many (38%) of this age group giving more than \$500 annually or more than once in the last 12 months.

There were some spikes associated with higher income levels; but, accounting for outliers, all income groups topped out at “About \$1,000 per year.” The highest income groups gave more than the lower ones, with 57% of those living in households of \$200,000 or more giving \$1,000 or more.

Figure 01: Number of different charities to which respondents made donations to in the past 12 months

Number of Nonprofits	Percentage of Donors
1	23%
2	27%
3	21%
4	9%
5	6%
6	2%
7 or more	12%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Figure 02: Total amount donated to all nonprofits, by household income.

Amount Donated to All Nonprofits	\$0-\$24,999	\$25,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$124,999	\$125,000-\$149,999	\$150,000-\$174,999	\$175,000-\$199,999	\$200,000 and up
Around \$25	33%	23%	17%	11%	7%	6%	4%	4%	11%
Around \$50	22%	21%	14%	9%	12%	9%	8%	4%	0%
Around \$100	30%	19%	18%	23%	19%	22%	4%	12%	11%
Around \$250	0%	21%	14%	19%	17%	22%	15%	16%	6%
Around \$500	0%	6%	14%	16%	15%	21%	25%	8%	15%
Around \$1,000	11%	6%	18%	15%	12%	11%	34%	36%	23%
\$5,000 or more	4%	3%	5%	7%	17%	9%	11%	20%	34%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Donors gave an average of 67% of their annual amount to their favorite charity.**

Donors were also asked how much they gave to their favorite charity. Donors gave an average of 67% of their annual donation amount to their favorite charity. This figure was calculated as the average difference between donors’ total annual giving amount (table above) and the amount they gave to their favorite charity (table below).

Figure 03: Total amount donated to their favorite charity, by household income.

Amount Donated to Favorite Charity	\$0-\$24,999	\$25,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$124,999	\$125,000-\$149,999	\$150,000-\$174,999	\$175,000-\$199,999	\$200,000 and up	Grand Total
Around \$25	48%	35%	29%	18%	13%	17%	6%	12%	11%	22%
Around \$50	19%	18%	18%	21%	21%	18%	11%	4%	6%	18%
Around \$100	15%	27%	16%	23%	21%	23%	17%	24%	9%	20%
Around \$250	4%	12%	11%	15%	10%	18%	21%	4%	17%	13%
Around \$500	4%	4%	11%	9%	14%	11%	21%	20%	15%	11%
Around \$1,000	7%	2%	12%	8%	5%	7%	17%	28%	15%	9%
\$5,000 or more	4%	3%	3%	6%	16%	5%	8%	8%	28%	7%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**More than 80% of young respondents (18 to 29 years) gave \$100 or less to their favorite charity in the last year.**

Age had a significant impact on the amount donors gave to their favorite charity. Younger respondents gave very little to their favorite charity. On the other hand, 30% of those 40 years or older reported giving \$500 or more to their favorite charity in the last 12 months.

*Figure 04: Amount Given by Donors to Their Favorite Charity In the Last 12 Months, by Age*

Donations by Age	18-20	21-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 or older	Grand Total
Around \$25	61%	40%	18%	18%	17%	25%	15%	22%
Around \$50	11%	14%	20%	18%	20%	14%	19%	18%
Around \$100	17%	27%	20%	18%	20%	20%	18%	20%
Around \$250	6%	7%	11%	17%	12%	16%	16%	13%
Around \$500	0%	7%	11%	14%	10%	11%	10%	11%
Around \$1,000	0%	5%	7%	7%	13%	10%	14%	9%
\$5,000 or more	6%	1%	12%	7%	7%	4%	8%	7%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## 2.2 BENCHMARKS: HOW NONPROFITS ARE ENGAGING DONORS

Donors were asked a series of questions focused on how nonprofits were engaging them through various media and activities.

### Donors get news and information about their favorite charity through a broad array of media.

Donors get information about their favorite charity in a world where media are becoming more fractured and less focused solely on direct mail and telemarketing. Donors reported that mail (79%) was the most common medium through which they received information. Online, more than half of donors received information from their favorite charity’s Web site (51%) and by email (52%) or eNewsletter (51%). With regard to social media, nearly 30% of donors report both visiting their favorite charity’s Facebook and liking it. Only 21% of donors report having received information about their favorite charity on Twitter.

### Age plays a strong role in predicting the way in which donors engage their favorite charity.

While older donors will prefer more traditional media like direct mail and email, younger donors favor social networks (especially the newer, less formal ones like Twitter) for communication with greater frequency.

Figure 05: Percentage of donors who “ever” receive information from their favorite charity, by medium.

Medium	Percentage of Donors
Mail	79%
eMail	52%
Visit Web site	51%
eNews	51%
Phone Call	40%
Visit Facebook	29%
Like Facebook	29%
Twitter	21%
Other	1%

Figure 06: Percentage of People by Age That Have Received Information from Their Favorite Charity at Least Monthly

Age	Twitter	“Liked” Charity Facebook Page (Ever)	Visit Charity Facebook Page	Visit Web Site	Receive eNewsletters	Receive Email	Receive Phone Call	Receive Paper Mail
18-20	17%	33%	22%	39%	22%	22%	28%	39%
21-29	20%	48%	27%	45%	43%	42%	22%	47%
30-39	34%	53%	39%	46%	48%	45%	40%	59%
40-49	9%	28%	12%	37%	36%	38%	21%	51%
50-59	7%	19%	15%	39%	34%	33%	22%	68%
60-69	0%	7%	2%	23%	29%	32%	19%	57%
70 or older	3%	6%	6%	22%	38%	32%	19%	70%

**Donors are engaging with their favorite charity on the Web and by email frequently.**

More than 50% of donors said they had received information on their favorite charity through the nonprofit's Web site, by direct mail, email and through eNewsletters at least once. Donors (40%) reported receiving information from email and eNewsletters more than a few times per year. A large number (35%) of donors reported visiting their favorite charity's Web site from "a few times a year" to "daily."

**Donors are thanked for gifts, but not all of the time.**

Regarding acknowledgments, 30% of donors reported being thanked immediately after giving a donation, and 18% reported that organizations reiterated their gratitude several times per year, or at least annually (17%). Surprisingly, a significant number of donors (21%) reported that they were never thanked.



## 2.3 BENCHMARKS: MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Donors were asked why they support their favorite charity, how often they participate in a variety of supportive activities, and which activities are the easiest to do.

### Donors engaged with their favorite charity are motivated by mission and connecting with others.

The majority of donors (65%) reported supporting their favorite charity because they “believe in the charity’s cause,” and nearly a third (30%) reported that they did so because they wanted to “help make change happen.”

Donors also seemed to support their favorite charity for social reasons. A significant number (20%) supported their favorite charity because they “have friends or family who support this cause.” Two more reasons were cited that involved personal relationships including “I know someone who has received services from this organization in the past” (19%) and “I want to connect with others in my community and/or those who share my values” (15%).

### Donors do a lot for their favorite charity.

Donors were asked to describe the things they do for their favorite charity, and with what frequency. Donors (55%) reported that they donate once or a few times per year. Many (36%) said they volunteer at least once per year, and perhaps more often. A significant group (32%) said they participate in fundraising events at least once per year. Finally, 29% fundraise on behalf of the charity at least once per year for their favorite charity.

### Donors are less likely to participate in advocacy activities and to share their story with their favorite charity.

Compared to fundraising and volunteer activities, relatively few donors were willing to advocate on behalf of their favorite charity. Only 27% of donors reported a desire to sign a petition once a year or more frequently. Just 20% were willing to contact legislators or elected officials by phone or email on behalf of the nonprofit. Finally, just 18% said they would share their story, related to their favorite charity’s cause once per year or more often.

Figure 07: Why are you involved with your favorite charity?

Reasons	Percentage*
I believe in the charity’s cause	65%
I want to help make change happen	30%
I have friends or family who support this cause	20%
I know someone who has received services from this organization in the past	19%
The charity asked for my help	18%
I want to set a good example	16%
I want to connect with others in my community and/or those who share my values	15%
I have received services from this organization in the past	12%
Other	3%

\*Respondents were invited to select all that apply.

**Age had a significant impact on the ways in which a donor is willing to engage their favorite charity.**

Of those donors that supported their favorite charity by engaging in one of a series of activities, age had a significant impact on their likelihood of doing so. People ages 30-69 were all highly willing to donate. Those under 50 were willing to fundraise on behalf of their favorite charity. Those under 40 were more likely to volunteer and participate in events like runs, walks, and galas. Donors ages 30-49 were most likely to share their stories and contact elected officials. Those under 40 were the most likely to sign a petition or pledge.

**Donors found that making a donation was the easiest thing they could do for their favorite charity.**

Respondents were asked to review the same list of supportive activities and rank them for ease of use –from very difficult to very easy. Excluding those who reported never having performed the activity, the overwhelming majority of donors (92%) reported that the easiest activity to perform was making a donation to their favorite charity. Donors by and large perceived the other activities moderately easy to perform. Many donors (70%) rated each activity easy to very easy to perform. There were no significant differences among demographic groups.

Figure 08: Most Likely Age Group to Engage in Support Activities

Activity	Age Group Most Likely to Engage
Make a donation to the charity	30 to 69
Volunteer for the charity	Under 50
Participate in fundraising events	Under 40
Fundraise on behalf of the charity	Under 50
Sign an online petition or pledge	Under 40
Contact elected officials	30 to 49
Share a personal story online	30 to 49

Figure 09: Perceived Ease of Engagement Activities

	Make a Donation	Volunteer	Participate in events	Fundraise on behalf of the charity	Sign a petition or pledge	Contact elected officials	Share my personal story
Very Easy	49%	28%	26%	23%	27%	21%	23%
Somewhat Easy	15%	22%	26%	25%	25%	28%	29%
Easy	28%	29%	27%	24%	26%	22%	21%
Difficult	2%	6%	6%	8%	6%	8%	9%
Somewhat Difficult	4%	11%	11%	15%	12%	15%	14%
Very Difficult	2%	4%	3%	4%	5%	5%	5%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## 2.4 BENCHMARKS: GETTING OTHERS INVOLVED IN ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Donors were asked about a series of activities and whether they found it easy to get others, like their friends and family, involved.

### Donors get their friends and family involved with their favorite charity.

A significant number of respondents spent time trying to get their friends and family involved with their favorite charity. Most frequently, donors encouraged others to donate and volunteer with their favorite charity. Donors also forwarded emails and eNewsletters from their favorite charity often. Although less frequently, donors shared content from their favorite charity with their social networks.

### Donors found it very easy to get others involved in activities on behalf of the organization.

Donors were asked how hard they perceived it was for them to share information about the charity, encourage others to donate, and ask others to volunteer. Of those who had ever done one of these three things, an overwhelming number (80% or more) found them “easy” to “very easy” to do. It should be noted that a significant number of respondents had never asked people to donate (34%), asked people to volunteer (42%), or shared information about a nonprofit with others (35%).

Figure 10: Activities that donors report doing at least a few times per year and as much as daily

Activity	Percentage of Respondents doing this at least a few times a year*
Talked to friends and family	54%
Encouraged friends and family to donate	40%
Encouraged friends and family to volunteer	30%
Forwarded an email	27%
Forwarded an eNewsletter	23%
Liked or commented on Facebook	22%
Retweeted a tweet from the charity	16%

\*Donors were invited to select all that apply.

## 2.5 BENCHMARKS: INFORMATION SEEKING AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY PREFERENCES

Donors were asked to describe which medium and device they preferred to use, as they considered learning about their favorite charity and its programs. They were also asked how they preferred to participate in activities like donating, registering for events, and taking action on advocacy campaigns.

### **The nonprofit's Web site is donors' top choice for learning about their favorite charity.**

For all engagement activities, donors preferred (36%) to visit their favorite charities' Web sites when seeking information about the charity. More than a quarter (28%) preferred to learn about their favorite charity by email. Facebook has become the preferred medium for a small portion of donors (6%) to learn about a nonprofit.

### **Age plays a strong role in determining how people prefer to engage across activities.**

Donors aged 50+ preferred visiting the Web site by computer and receiving email. Those under 50 years old reported using mobile, text, and Twitter more often than older donors. Tablet use was greatest by donors under 40.

### **For engagement activities, donors largely prefer to visit their favorite charity's Web site via their computer.**

Almost half (47%) of donors preferred to visit a nonprofit's Web site via a computer. Significant numbers of donors preferred mail (15%) and email (11%). Nearly 7% still prefer to get involved in these activities in person, which underscores the social aspects driving a donor's desire to engage with their favorite charity.

### **Donors preferred to spread the word about their favorite charity by email, Facebook and in person.**

The preferred method for just over half of donors (51%) was to send emails to others. Facebook was preferred by 15%, and in-person outreach was a preferred medium by 14% of respondents.

### 3. PUTTING THESE FINDINGS TO WORK

This survey illuminates several key patterns related to donor behavior, preferences and expectations. Nonprofits can use these findings to improve how, when, and where they engage their donors. This section summarizes ways in which these findings can be put to use.

#### Seek to Become Your Donors' Favorite Charity

This study demonstrates that a donor's charitable attention may be distributed across multiple causes, but that he or she is likely to give a greater portion of their annual giving to a single charity with which they feel most connected to. Nonprofits should add achievement of this "favorite charity" status as a goal along with new donor acquisition and revenue goals. Nonprofits can benchmark this position through periodic donor surveys, which can include a series of items similar to the ones used in this survey. Measuring this over time will provide fundraising and marketing staff with a relative measure of their organization's value to its donor base.

#### Make Investments in Engagement, Not Just Conversion, Especially With Younger Donors

Many nonprofits focus on short-term goals. Given that younger consumers are donating less than older ones, it's tempting to focus on the older donors who give today. However, at some point in the future, younger consumers will be ready to donate. Investing in engagement, even when younger donors are not contributing

as much as their older counterparts, may help establish a nonprofit's position as their favorite charity for the years to come. In addition to annual donation ("conversion") goals, it would be wise to set "engagement" goals that target both younger and older supporters.

#### Increase engagement with strategy and tactics built for your audience.

In order to drive the highest engagement rates, nonprofits should consider approaching donors where they are spending time online and via devices they are already using to learn about the nonprofit. These inputs create the foundation for three pillars of a plan to maximize engagement.

- **Meet your donors where they are.** Nonprofits can reach them more effectively and convert them with greater frequency if they understand their donors' demographics and attitudes.
- **Consider the right media mix for your audience.** While a nonprofit's Web site is only one of many media through which donors engage an organization, it remains the most important. Rather than trying to be all things to all people, nonprofits should make relative investments in different media based on the ones that are appropriate for their unique audience.
- **Target the right three segments, not three hundred.** While it's easy for a nonprofit to get excited about slicing its audience into the tiniest of segments for targeting, nonprofits should consider the big picture. Instead of taking a blind approach to what segmentation schemes "might" work, this survey suggests that nonprofits should focus on age, donation volume, and engagement levels first.

## 4. APPENDIX A: STUDY METHODOLOGY

Charity Dynamics and NTEN administered an online survey to 1,814 participants. Participants were recruited randomly through a Web based recruitment panel. From those participants, 1,022 reported donating at least once in the previous 12 months. These “donors” represented both small and large donors alike – giving as little as \$25 in a year to \$5,000 or more. The numbers presented in this report focused on the responses from the 1,022 participants who reported giving in the last 12 months.

Given the online delivery of the survey, it can be assumed that responses were moderately skewed by a priming effect that sampled consumers who spent more time online than what would be expected for a random sample of consumers with the same demographic characteristics.

## 5. APPENDIX B: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Raw Number	Percentage of Respondents
Total Respondents	1,814	100%
Those Who Have Donated in the Last 12 Months	1,172	65%

*Non-Donors were excluded from all other results.*

Figure 11: Donor Age

Age	Total	Percentage of Donors
18-20	18	2%
21-29	107	9%
30-39	270	23%
40-49	191	16%
50-59	192	16%
60-69	136	12%
70 or older	108	9%
(blank)	150	13%
Grand Total	1172	100

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS CONTINUED

Figure 12: Donor Gender

Gender	Total	Percentage of Donors
Female	501	43%
Male	521	44%
(blank)	150	13%
	1172	100%

Figure 13: Donor Income

Income	Total	Percentage of Donors
\$0-\$24,999	27	2%
\$25,000-\$49,999	108	9%
\$50,000-\$74,999	263	22%
\$75,000-\$99,999	257	22%
\$100,000-\$124,999	155	13%
\$125,000-\$149,999	87	7%
\$150,000-\$174,999	53	5%
\$175,000-\$199,999	25	2%
\$200,000 and up	47	4%
(blank)	150	13%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1172</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 14: Donor Education

Education	Total	Percentage of Donors
Associate degree	115	10%
Bachelor degree	363	31%
Graduate degree	249	21%
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	82	7%
Less than high school degree	4	0%
Some college but no degree	209	18%
(blank)	150	13%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1172</b>	<b>100%</b>

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS CONTINUED

Figure 15: Donor Job Type

Job Type	Total	Percentage of Donors
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	22	2%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	15	1%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	5	0%
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	65	6%
Community and Social Service Occupations	18	2%
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	59	5%
Construction and Extraction Occupations	17	1%
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	85	7%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	10	1%
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	12	1%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	50	4%
Healthcare Support Occupations	36	3%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	15	1%
Legal Occupations	27	2%
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	13	1%
Management Occupations	74	6%
Marketing and Communications Related Occupations	19	2%
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	54	5%
Other (please specify)	320	27%
Personal Care and Service Occupations	13	1%
Production Occupations	19	2%
Protective Service Occupations	12	1%
Sales and Related Occupations	46	4%
Transportation and Materials Moving Occupations	16	1%
(blank)	150	13%
Grand Total	1172	100