



# 2023 Nonprofit **LEADERSHIP IMPACT STUDY**

INSIGHTS INTO THE SUCCESSES  
AND STRUGGLES OF TODAY'S  
NONPROFIT LEADERS

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# 2023 Nonprofit LEADERSHIP IMPACT STUDY

INSIGHTS INTO THE SUCCESSES AND STRUGGLES OF TODAY'S NONPROFIT LEADERS

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NonProfit PRO is excited to release the “2023 Nonprofit Leadership Impact Study.” In its fifth edition, this research effort continues to uncover the latest trends, opportunities, and challenges for nonprofit leadership, fundraising, donor engagement, and technology.

Workforce shortages and an impending recession continue to hurt nonprofits' bottom lines. Staffing and volunteer shortages subsequently make services suffer, while economic uncertainty pushes small-dollar donors to pull back on charitable donations — or worse, stop giving altogether.

As the number of donors dwindles and a larger share of total donations continues to come from a smaller pool of donors, it becomes more difficult for nonprofits to know where to set their priorities for the year ahead. On top of that, the need is greater than ever for a strategic plan to lay out fundraising goals and priorities; a truly omnichannel approach that includes a variety of digital channels; and an investment in technology that provides online fundraising payment options, donor database analytical features, and so much more.

Therefore, the “2023 Nonprofit Leadership Impact Study” will take a look at nonprofit struggles and successes in the past year, and reveal what's to come for nonprofit leaders in the year ahead.

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## II. KEY FINDINGS

### **A lack of resources continues to hamper nonprofits' efforts to fulfill their missions.**

- 40% of respondents listed “lack of resources” as a top challenge. This challenge moved up to the No. 1 spot on the list of reported challenges, after landing behind donor acquisition in 2021's survey.
- Staffing is the No. 1 resource nonprofits are lacking, with more than half of respondents citing “competitive compensation” and “not overworking staff members” as key employee-related struggles.

### **The economy has also affected donor's wallets, resulting in difficulties when it comes to donor engagement, particularly in digital channels.**

- Even though 78% of respondents cited employing digital communications to engage donors, more than half indicated that only 30% or less of their fundraising dollars actually come from those digital channels.
- Approximately 58% of respondents listed the biggest challenge to moving donors online is reaching the right audience or building a strong online community.

### **Nonprofits are showing signs of embracing technology, but many still face hurdles they can't overcome without investments and training in technology.**

- Almost half of respondents listed donor research as a major challenge.
- Further, nonprofits cited numerous data hurdles. Most notably, 28% are not capturing the correct data in order to fully understand who their donors are and how to engage them. Another common hurdle circled back to the lack of staffing.

### **Nonprofits are beginning to take strategic planning seriously.**

- About 52% claimed to outline an in-depth strategic plan for fundraising initiatives — 5 points higher than 2021's results.
- Major gifts (44%) took the lead over direct mail (43%) for the top revenue-producing fundraising strategy, showing the shift in major donors contributing a bigger share of overall fundraising totals in recent years.



### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

NonProfit PRO sent an online survey to nonprofit leaders, asking them to identify key trends, opportunities, and challenges facing nonprofit leadership. From Nov. 4 through Nov. 21, 2022, 325 people completed the survey.

With that in mind, the majority of respondents (70%) identified themselves as either a CEO, executive director, president, or chief development officer at their respective organizations (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Nonprofit Respondents' Role**

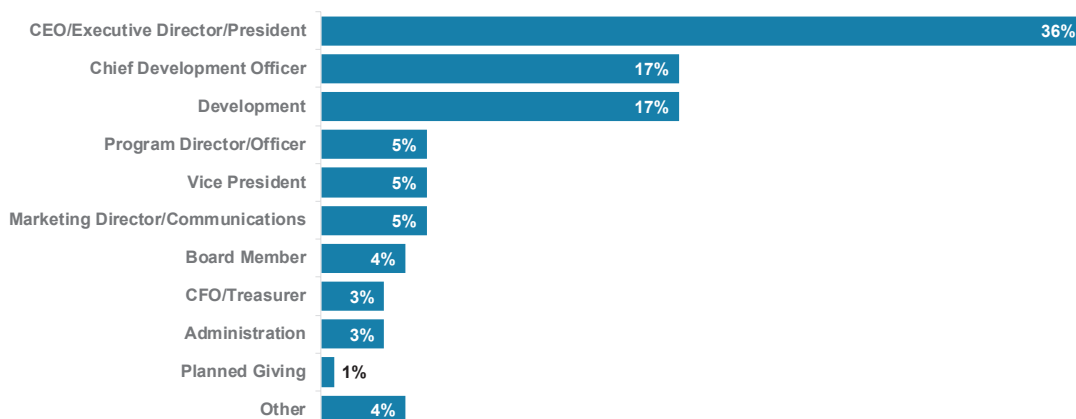
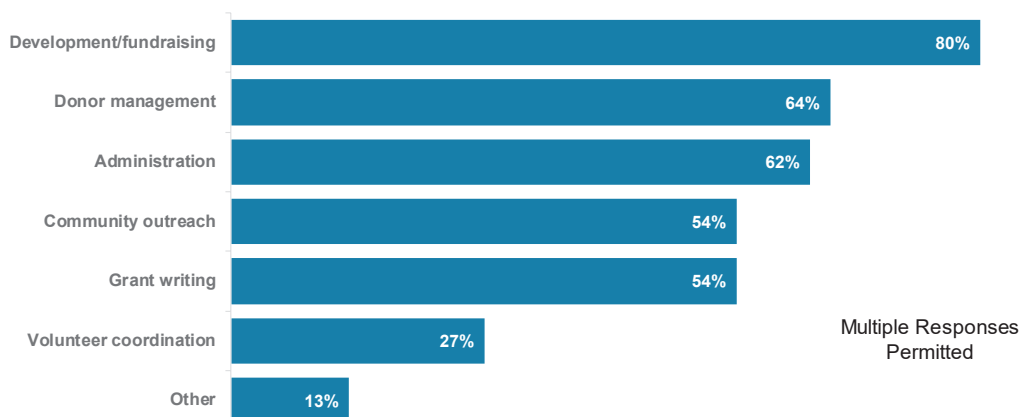


Figure 1: What is your role at your organization?  
n = 325

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When it comes to job responsibilities, most nonprofit professionals wear many hats. Respondents to this survey were no different. Approximately 80% were involved in development, 64% in donor management, 62% in administration work, and 54% in grant writing and/or community outreach (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Nonprofit Respondents' Responsibilities**



Multiple Responses  
Permitted

Figure 2: Which of the following are you responsible for?  
n = 325

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In order to measure the variety of missions our research would reach, we asked respondents to categorize their nonprofits (Figure 3). Leading the way were organizations focused on human services (36%); health (14%); arts, culture, and humanities (13%); and education (10%).

**Figure 3: Nonprofits' Area of Focus**

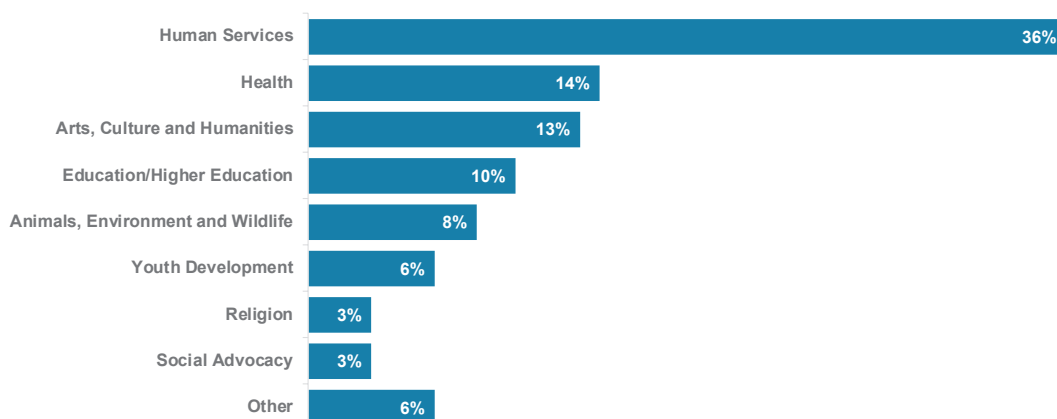


Figure 3: What category does your nonprofit fall into?  
n = 325

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Finally, the size of the organizations varied widely, with 18% having an operating budget of more than \$10 million, 39% landing between \$1 million and \$10 million, and 43% citing an operating budget of less than \$1 million (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Nonprofit Operating Budget**

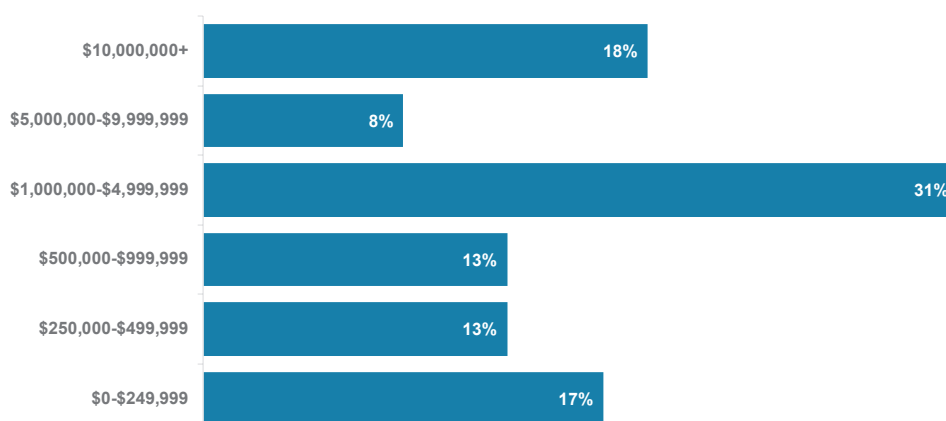


Figure 4: What is your organization's operating budget?  
n = 325

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## IV. WORKFORCE SHORTAGES AND HIRING DIFFICULTIES SEVERELY HAMPER NONPROFITS

The Great Resignation — mixed with an economic downturn and inflation — made 2022 a difficult year for all employers, but it was particularly hard on nonprofits. A lack of resources (40%) became their No. 1 challenge, jumping up from No. 2 in 2021 and overtaking donor acquisition (37%), which also dropped 4 points. Respondents mentioned a variety of staffing issues, including lacking staff, volunteers, and/or board members, as well as difficulty in hiring staff and compensating them fairly. Staff turnover made the biggest leap (15 points) from No. 7 on the 2021 list to the third largest challenge (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Key Nonprofit Leadership Challenges**

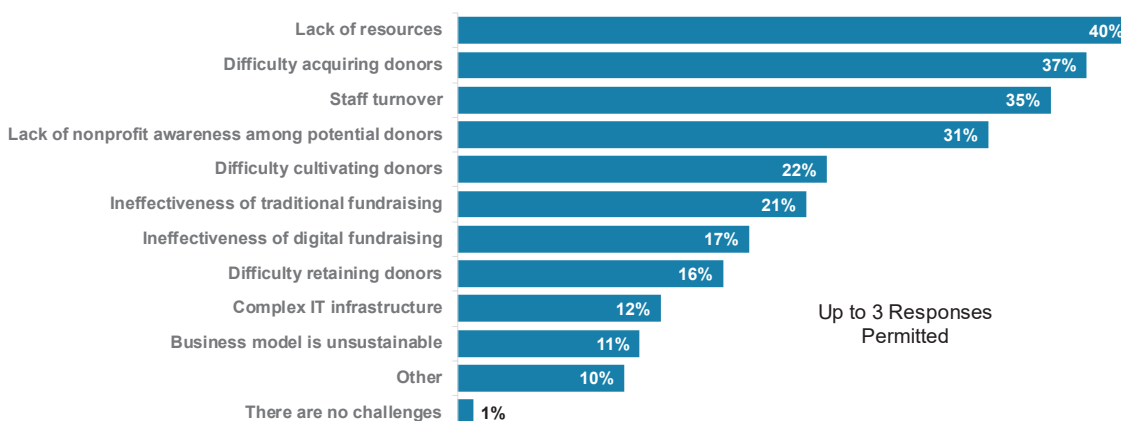


Figure 5: What are the key challenges facing your nonprofit's leadership team? (Select up to three)  
n = 325

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Organizations that have workforce shortages are unable to deliver the same level of services to constituents, according to the National Council of Nonprofits.<sup>1</sup> On top of that, economic downturns usually result in more strain on nonprofits, which often serve those most affected by recessions. That financial strain makes it difficult to compete with rising wages employees can command in the for-profit sector.

The top picks also seemed to be more challenging across nonprofits overall. In 2021, only resources and donor acquisition topped 30%, whereas four challenges made at least 30% of leaders' lists of top challenges this time around.

When digging deeper to learn which resources nonprofits are lacking, specific positions/roles (70%), marketing budget (56%), donations (54%), grants (51%), and donor research (46%) rounded out the top five (Figure 6). Compared to 2021, marketing budgets dropped 5 percentage points, but maintained the No. 2 slot, while donations jumped 4 points, surpassing grants. Donor research jumped 7 points.

**Figure 6: Resources Nonprofits Are Lacking**

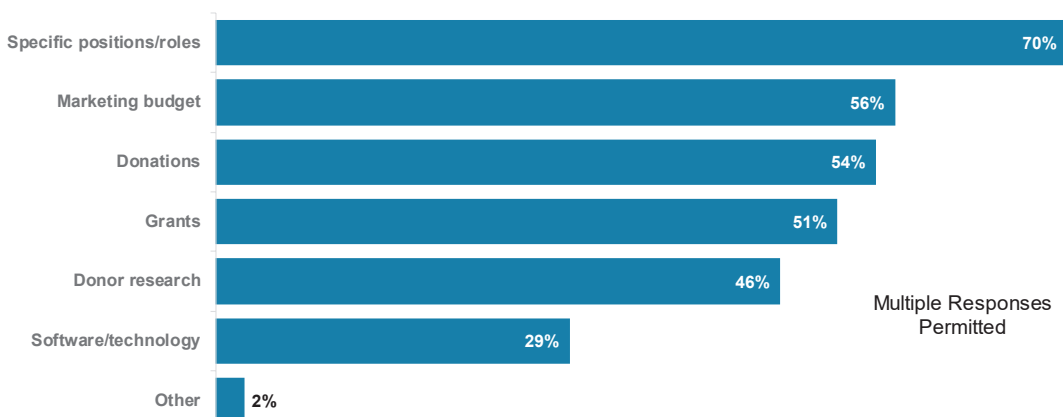


Figure 6: What type(s) of resources are you lacking?  
n = 127 respondents who cited "Lack of resources" as a key challenge facing their nonprofit's leadership team

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The solutions to these challenges remain relatively steady year-over-year (Figure 7), with 55% seeking out excellent board members, and 47% executing grassroots awareness methods. The most significant difference from 2021's results is the 13-point drop in those implementing crowdfunding campaigns.

**Figure 7: Methods Implemented to Address Nonprofit Leadership Challenges**

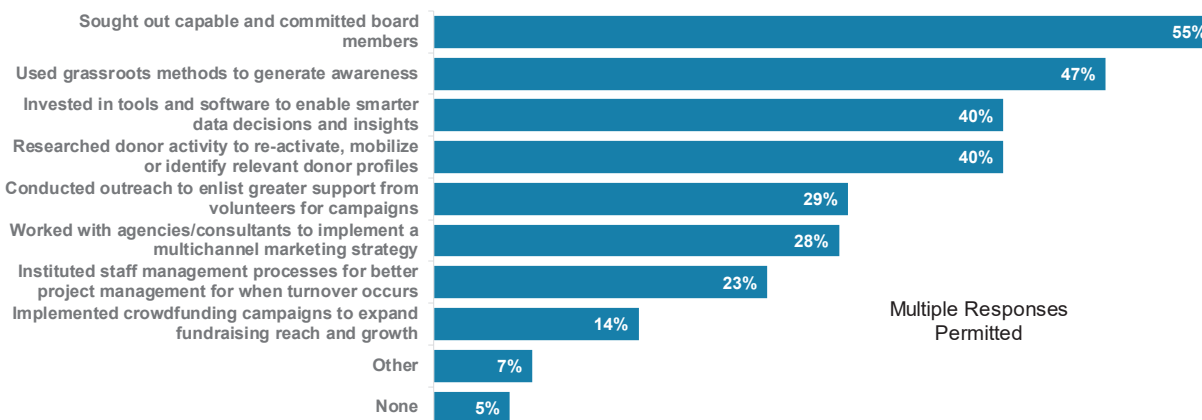


Figure 7: What methods has your nonprofit implemented to address these challenges?  
n = 321 respondents who cited at least one challenge

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However, some nonprofits cited “other” creative ideas. One respondent hired a development and grants officer — “a rare phenomenon,” they noted — who has been excellent at securing grants and associated funds. A few respondents noted increasing pay for employees when possible. Others provide incentives, such as flexible work hours and staff training, including one-on-one coaching.

The top three staff struggles remained the same, with compensation (58%), overworking staff (57%), and hiring/retaining staff (47%) leading again (Figure 8). The latter made a sizable jump among the struggles, with an 18-point increase over 2021’s figure.

**Figure 8: Top Nonprofit Staff Management Struggles**

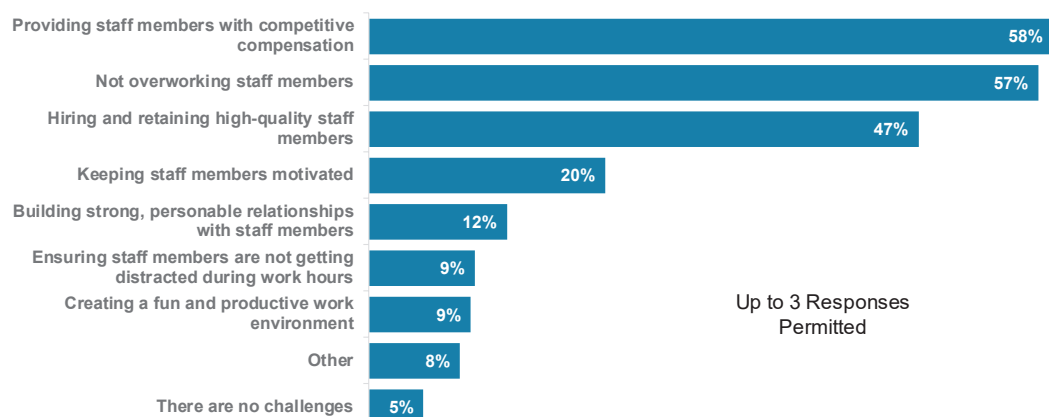


Figure 8. What does your nonprofit struggle with the most in managing its staff?  
n = 324

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“Other” respondents cited issues that included relying on a 100% volunteer staff, providing growth opportunities, staff accountability, and returning to the office. For those adjusting to a remote work environment, respondents cited being able to build relationships among staff and effectively engage with them as challenges.

A nonprofit’s board is a resource as well. Getting board members to participate in fundraising activities remains the top challenge at 70% — 5 points higher than in 2021. However, keeping board members engaged fell from second to fourth, dropping 9 points from the last survey. Defining clear roles and expectations, and ensuring a member’s understanding of fundraising also dropped a few points each, but bumped up to No. 2 and tied for No. 3, respectively (Page 10, Figure 9).



## Figure 9: Top Nonprofit Challenges Influencing Board Effectiveness

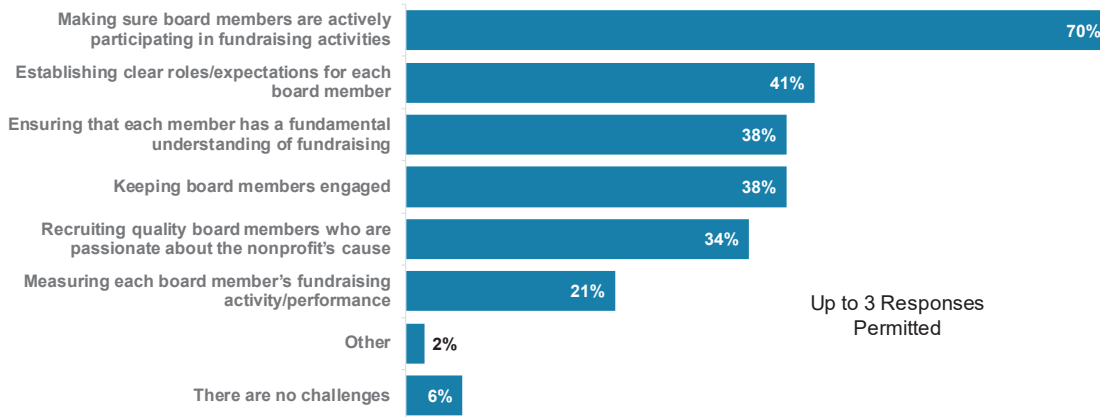


Figure 9: What are the top three challenges influencing the effectiveness of your board of directors?  
n = 321

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When it came to expectations, a few noted they don't currently communicate them well or at all. It's important to make a board member's roles and responsibilities clear prior to them becoming a board member. At an AFP-NYC 2022 panel, development leaders at nonprofits shared their tips, which included providing high-level development goals to board members, and creating a road map for each board member so they commit to fundraising expectations in advance.<sup>2</sup>

Other respondents cited creating a diverse board and enforcing term limits as obstacles.



## V. NONPROFITS STRUGGLE TO MEET DONORS WHERE THEY WANT TO GIVE

The economy not only played a role in staffing — it also affected donors' wallets. And that shows with respondents ranking donations as the third biggest resource that is lacking (Page 7, Figure 6). Though acquisition was the second largest challenge (Page 6, Figure 5), acquisition rates remained relatively flat since 2020 (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Donor Acquisition Rate in 2021**

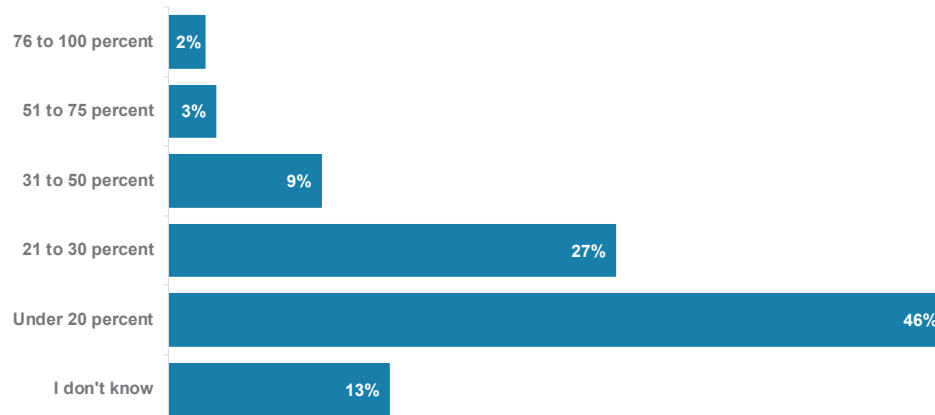


Figure 10: Looking at your nonprofit's total donors in 2021, what percent of donors were newly acquired in 2021?  
n = 320

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On the other hand, nonprofits cited their increased difficulty in retaining donors, as it jumped 6 points (Page 6, Figure 5) — the second biggest increase compared to 2021 after staff turnover — although retention remained toward the bottom of the list of challenges (No. 8). In terms of 2021's retention rate, there was a sizable decrease (17%) among those who cited the nonprofit's retention at 50% or higher in 2021 (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Donor Retention Rate in 2021**

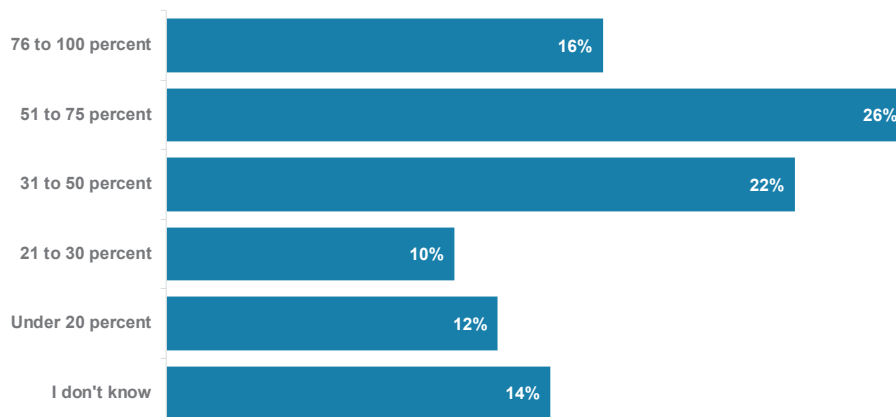


Figure 11: Looking at your nonprofit's total donors in 2021, what percent of donors were retained in 2021?  
n = 322

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With a potential recession in the near future, Dan Reed, CFRE, senior account director of digital fundraising at nonprofit agency Media Cause, urged nonprofits to focus on donor retention during economic downturns.<sup>3</sup> This tactic, he stressed, separates emergency — or impulse — donors from donors who truly care about your cause.

“The first advantage of this approach is that the nonprofit will likely be pursuing an entirely different audience than emergency donors, meaning that any extra noise in the larger fundraising landscape will be less of a competing factor,” he said. “Second, when a nonprofit focuses on retention, it positions itself to capture that all-important second gift, which is vital to long-term fundraising stability, as repeat givers have an almost 1,000 times higher average value over five years than a donor who only gives once.”

Having a donor engagement plan is also crucial for a nonprofit’s success in any year, and particularly in a challenging year like is expected in 2023. An astonishing 59% of nonprofits admitted to not outlining their donor engagement strategy (Figure 12). That’s a 5-point decrease over 2021’s survey.

## Figure 12: Nonprofits That Develop Donor Engagement Strategies

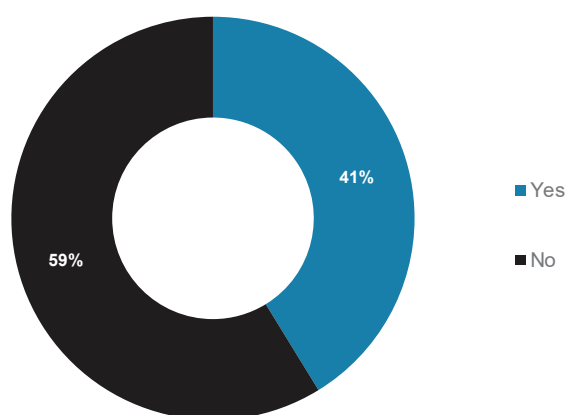


Figure 12: At the start of each fiscal year, does your nonprofit outline a donor engagement strategy?  
n = 325

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Among tactics used to engage donors, monthly giving bumped ahead of educational programs. The only other major difference was a rebound for face-to-face communication, which increased by 12 points over 2021 (Figure 13). The previous survey was completed in January of 2021, prior to many nonprofits having resumed in-person engagement.

**Figure 13: Donor Engagement Strategies**

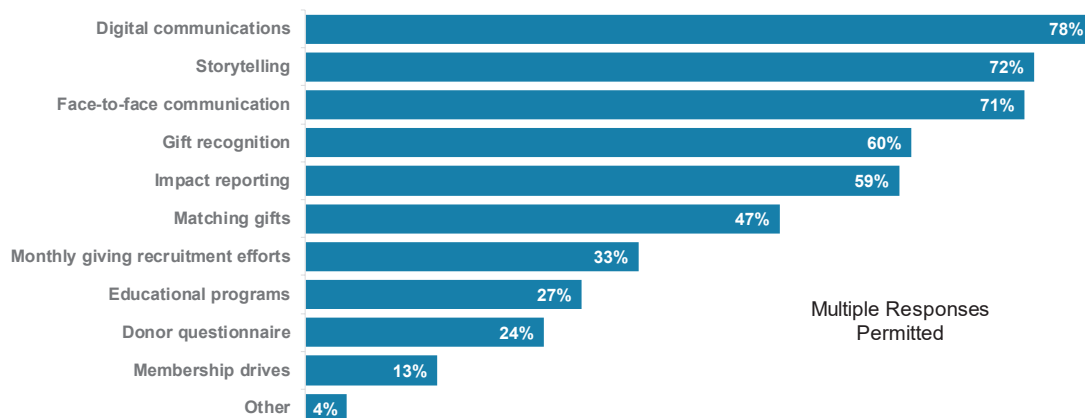


Figure 13: Which strategies has your nonprofit utilized to engage donors?  
n = 323

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Aside from an overall engagement strategy, providing donors with the options to donate how they want is also important. Some of those options include digital ways to give, but our most recent data shows a slide away from that, with an increase (7 points) in those reporting less than 20% of their fundraising is digital, and a decrease (11 points) in those reporting 51% or more of their fundraising comes via online channels. Surprisingly, 78% reported 50% or less of giving came through digital channels. (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Amount of Digital Fundraising**

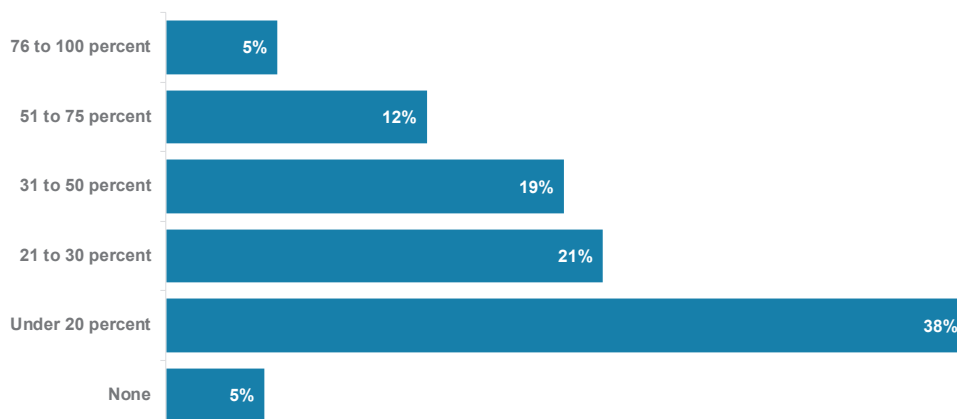


Figure 14: What percent of your fundraising is digital?  
(If you are not certain, please estimate to the best of your ability.)  
n = 323

NonProfitPRO

Per Wayne Elsey, founder/CEO at Elsey Enterprises, “Nonprofits need to understand that their prospective donors and supporters aren’t all one way or another. They all have different backgrounds, interests, and they also prefer to give differently.” <sup>4</sup>

There are so many ways to give, so it’s important to not have barriers for donors — and not offering as many ways to give as possible can result in your organization missing out on donations. In 2023, you simply can’t overlook online giving and accepting a variety of payment options, like ACH, EFT, credit cards, Apple Pay, PayPal, and Venmo, just to name a few. You may even notice that 5% have zero online fundraising capabilities.

Respondents did cite their largest challenge to moving fundraising efforts online. Once again, reaching the right audience topped the list, followed by building a strong online community (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Biggest Challenge With Moving More Fundraising Online**

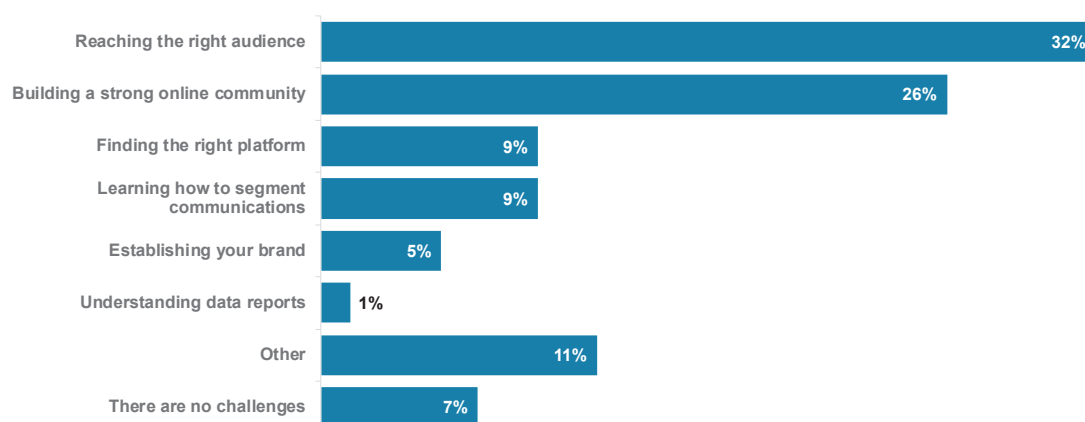


Figure 15: What is the biggest challenge related to moving more of your fundraising efforts online?  
n = 323

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One obstacle to building an online audience might be due to the lack of a marketing budget, which nonprofits cited as the second biggest insufficient resource (Page 7, Figure 6). Nonprofit marketing doesn’t only build awareness, but an effective omnichannel marketing strategy helps organizations to meet donors where they are, which could be a combination of offline and online channels working together to build awareness, steward, and make the asks.



Another issue might stem from a staggering 25% of respondents not participating in Giving Tuesday, a mighty, year-end online campaign (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Giving Tuesday Revenue in 2021**

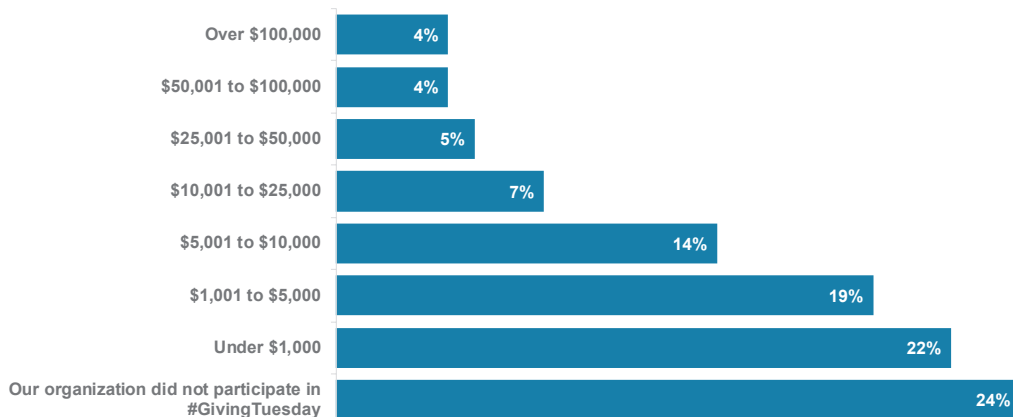


Figure 16: During #GivingTuesday in 2021, how much did your nonprofit raise?  
n = 324

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Though Giving Tuesday isn't a must-do fundraising activity, it is certainly a strong way to kick off year-end giving and begin to build a loyal community online. About 37 million Americans participated in Giving Tuesday last year, donating \$3.1 billion to nonprofits.<sup>5</sup>

"Giving Tuesday 2022 was another impactful day of community-centered generosity, where people in every single country in the world collectively prioritized giving back, and celebrated that we all have something to give and we all can create change," Asha Curran, CEO of GivingTuesday, said.

Almost half (46%) of nonprofits received less than 20% of their fundraising dollars via year-end campaigns (Figure 17), slightly below the industry average of 25%, according to M+R.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 17: Amount of Fundraising From Year-End Campaigns**

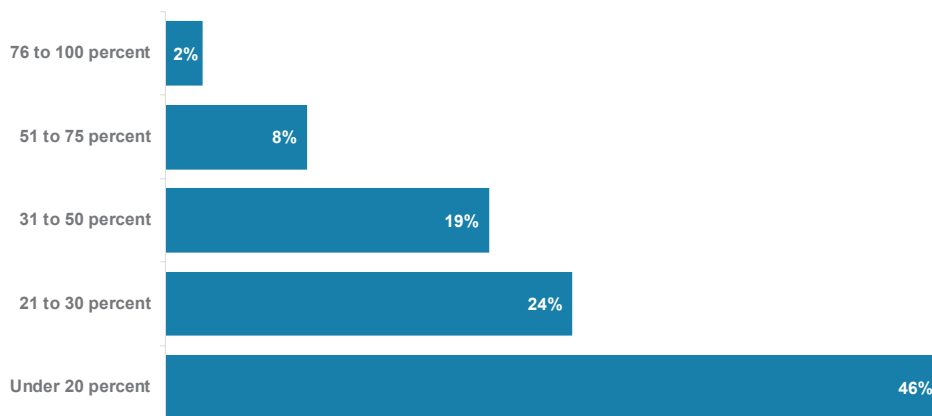


Figure 17: What percent of your nonprofit's fundraising comes from year-end giving campaigns?  
n = 323

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## VI. NONPROFITS SHOW FURTHER SIGNS OF EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY, BUT STILL LACK DATA

Though a common thread in past surveys was organizations not taking advantage of advancements in nonprofit technology, this survey's results showed signs that nonprofits are embracing technology more and more.

Technology was last among scarce resources and dropped 9 points to 38% over 2021's results (Page 7, Figure 6). Additionally, investing in technology fell 5 points among top priorities for 2023 (Page 20, Figure 24), and while this could be the result of preparing for a recession, it could also signal that many nonprofits have recently made the necessary investments in technology.

To improve donor relationships, more than half (55%) noted their use of a donor management software, with almost half utilizing fundraising and communications management software (49% and 45%, respectively) (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Technologies Used to Improve Donor Relationships**

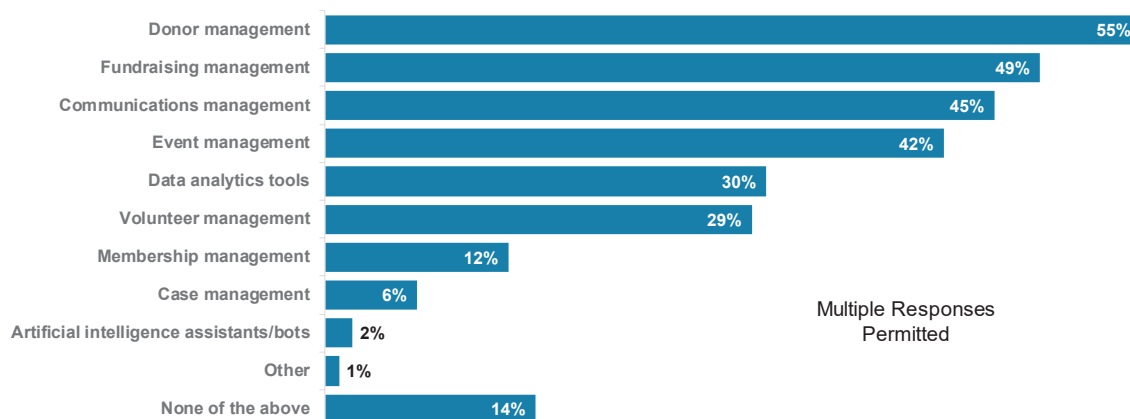


Figure 18: Which of the following technologies has your nonprofit used to improve donor relationships?  
n = 321

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Almost three-quarters of respondents acknowledged using more than one type of technology to improve donor relationships. In fact, 65% cited two to five technologies while 13% only use one. However, 14% indicated that they use none of the technology types listed.

When we inquired what challenges organizations face when seeking a new technology solution, respondents overwhelmingly indicated budget as the largest hurdle (Page 16, Figure 19). However, that was a concern for a smaller percentage of respondents than in 2021. “We don’t know where to start” jumped 5 points and moved up one spot, surpassing those indicating they have not looked for a new technology investment.

## Figure 19: Biggest Challenges for New Technology Investments

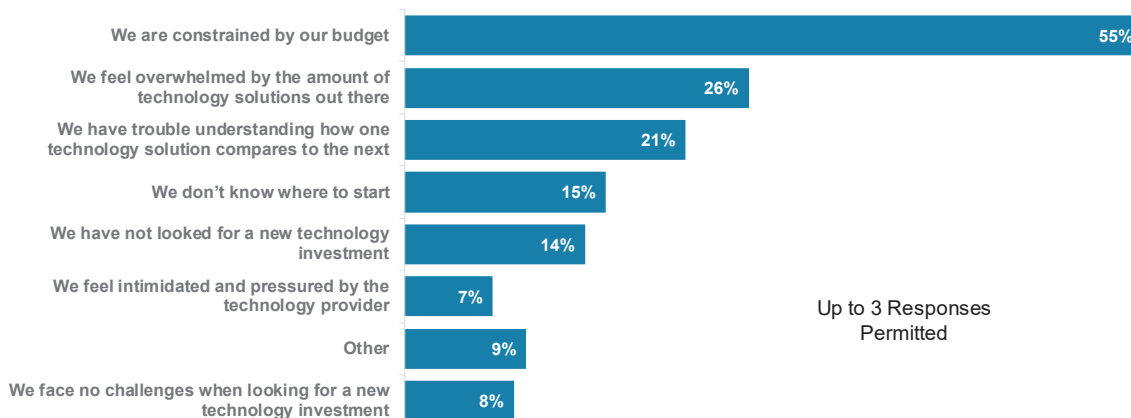


Figure 19: When looking for a new technology solution to invest in, what are your organization's biggest challenges? | NonProfitPRO  
n = 318

When it came to data, the results were different. Among lacking resources, the second lowest was donor research, which spiked 7 points to 46% (Page 7, Figure 6). This question made that struggle clearer — 28% admitted they were not capturing the correct data. Other popular choices noted decentralized databases (23%), unorganized data (18%), and staff turnover (18%) — and even relying on spreadsheets (20%) — as reasons why they had trouble understanding and engaging donors (Figure 20).

## Figure 20: Donor Data and Engagement Challenges

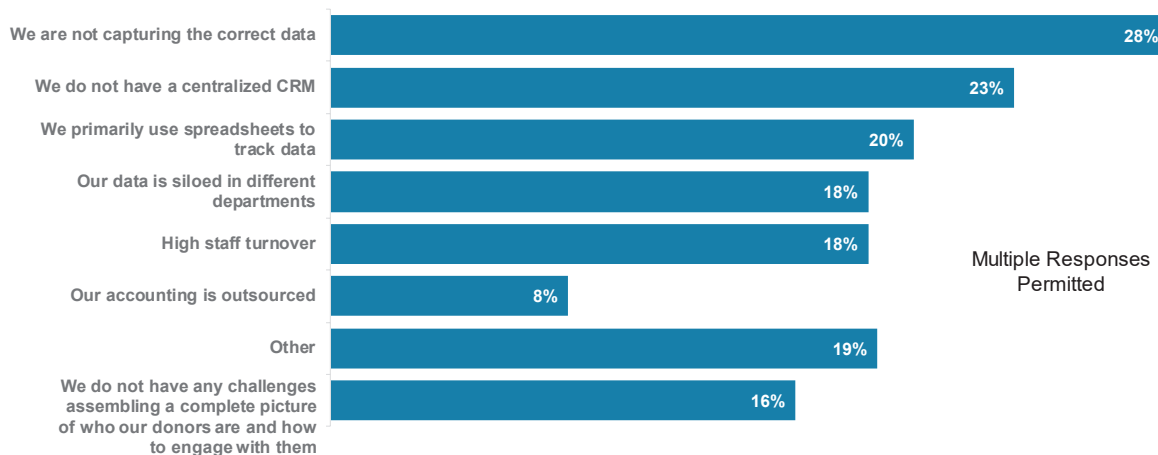


Figure 20: What challenges does your organization face when trying to assemble a complete picture of who your donors are and how to engage them. | NonProfitPRO  
n = 323

But that wasn't all of the issues. When it came to data obstacles, 19% had more to say, mainly citing not having the time, staff, or expertise to segment or analyze the data, though others mentioned outdated or ineffective CRMs as the culprits.



## Here are some highlights of respondents' brief overview of their strategic plans:

- [Our strategic plan is] broken down by different avenues of giving. Each category has a goal, the previous year's total revenue, and what we will be doing differently this year to increase the goal specifically. For instance, "lapsed donors — convert 10% of donors who haven't given in over 18 months to active donors." Last year, we converted 8%. This year we will run campaigns for those who haven't given in 14 months, 18 months, and 24 months.
- We are attempting to move away from fundraising via events toward major giving with multi-year commitments. After a donor analysis of three years, we saw where we were losing donors, and are now about to launch a new leadership giving circle to keep our major donors (We tested our planned effort and experienced success). Our biggest challenge is engaging the board in donor stewardship so that we can move our lower gift level donors up. We also launched a monthly giving club to inspire donors at every level. Much of our work is foundational — the organization used to rely on events and grants, and that was it. Our donors are older, but we also did some work on persona development for the next cohort of donors we'd like to attract. We have a robust communications plan that shares our case for support through storytelling and impact data.
- [In 2023,] we will be celebrating our 55th year as an organization, and we have a plan that includes monthly celebrations, activities, and fundraising campaigns. Traditionally, we have one major fundraiser in the middle of the year, [and] all other months focus on building up our sustaining donor base, and cultivating our end-of-year giving campaign.
- We have a three-year strategic plan, and our annual plans are an outgrowth of this in order to ensure we're aligned and focused on the right outcomes.
- We look at two main objectives: to grow our capital campaign, and to support our operational requirements. Our strategic plan utilizes a number of tactics related to how we intend to reach our targets for each objective. We do utilize software for wealth screening to analyze and work with potential candidates for longer term giving aimed at our capital campaign. For our operating requirements, we focus on a multitude of options that include events and programs to solicit support. Throughout all of this, we have diligently worked to make sure the impact of our work is communicated to the marketplace daily through social media, and weekly/monthly through other venues. Marketing our impact is critical to our ability to [make] sure our donors know where their investments go. We believe these stories serve as the inspiration that results in the donors making a decision to support us.
- [Our] department's strategic plan is one piece of [our] annual organization plan, which is part of [a] larger four-year strategic plan that the organization has approved with input from [the] board.
- We begin this process in August, and have a plan in place for events, campaigns, digital media and marketing needs with timelines and due dates and assignments. We use [a project management tool] to track our plan, tasks, dates, etc., and review at our bimonthly meetings.



When it comes to development, about a quarter (23%) of respondents categorized their nonprofit as relying 100% on fundraising, whereas only 3% did not rely on fundraising for the bottom line at all. The remaining 74% were fairly evenly distributed at other percentage levels (Figure 22).

**Figure 22: Amount of Operating Budget Raised by Fundraising**

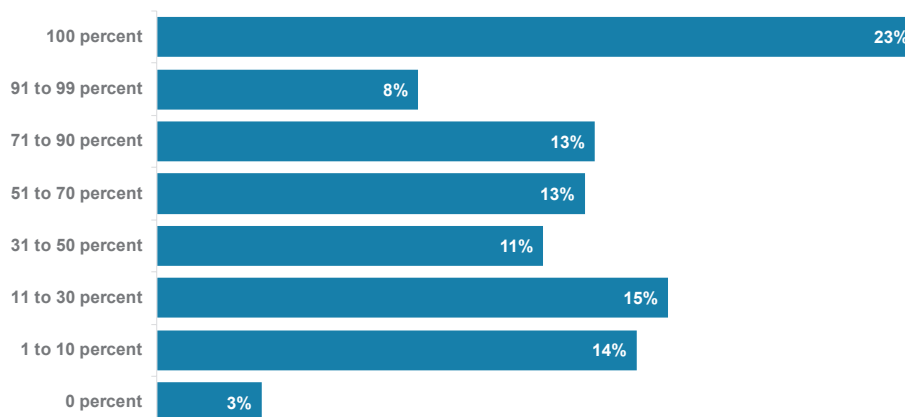


Figure 22: What percentage of your operating budget is raised by fundraising (including grants)?  
n = 323

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What has worked the best for respondents in the past year received a bit of a shakeup over 2021's results, with direct mail falling from the top spot. Major gift fundraising, which was third in 2021, is now the top revenue-producing fundraising strategy. Online fundraising rounded out the top three, showing how important it is to move more efforts online (Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Top Revenue-Producing Fundraising Strategies**

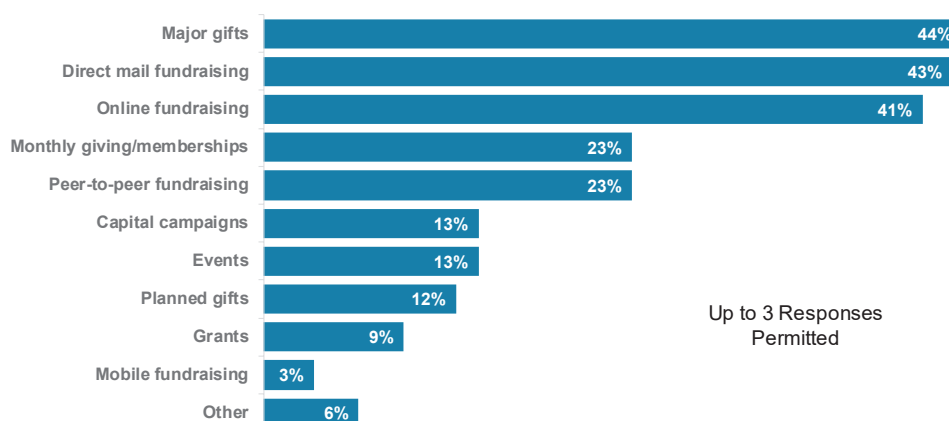


Figure 23: What are your organization's top revenue-producing fundraising strategies?  
n = 321

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A major gifts program could take years to grow to an organization's top revenue-producing strategy. Richard Perry, founder of Veritus Group, notes a program might not generate more revenue than is spent until its second year, with healthier results expected in years three through five.<sup>7</sup>

"People who are not familiar with how major gifts work actually think that there are a ton of donors who just cannot wait to give more," he said. "This is not true. The truth is that there are a ton of donors in your active donor file who could give more, but it will take time to develop the relationship to the point where they will give more."

Respondents' top priorities for 2023 were across the board, though corporate partnerships (22%), as well as increasing recurring and monthly gifts and data-driven decisions (15% each) were the most popular choices (Figure 24). That outcome roughly mirrored 2021's results.

**Figure 24: Nonprofits' Top Priority for 2023**

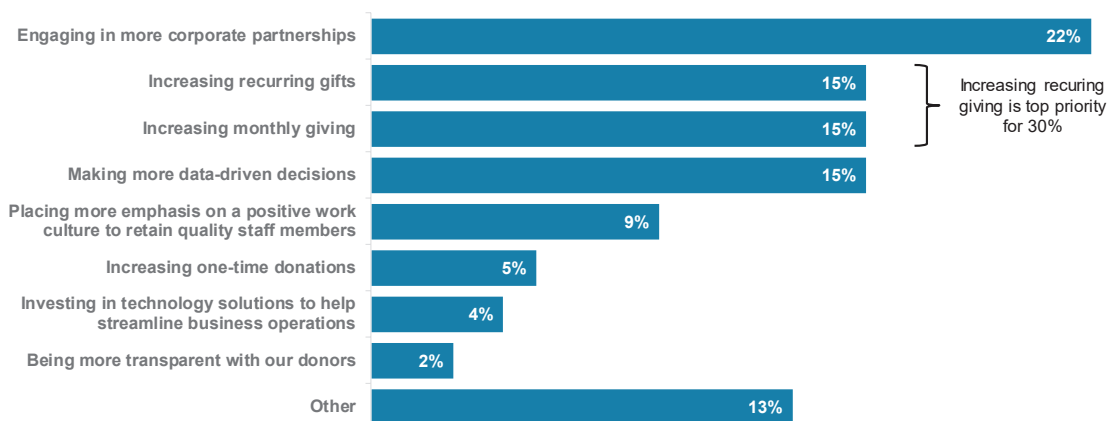


Figure 24: What is your top priority for 2023?  
n = 321

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However, what respondents listed as "other" yielded a variety of priorities for this year. A handful of respondents listed attracting more major gifts or just raising more money in general. Other responses were diversifying funding, improving stewardship, building a culture of philanthropy, growing the donor base, recruiting board members, hiring key staff, and serving more individuals, among others.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

With yet another difficult year ahead, nonprofits need to take a serious look at what they can do to overcome some of the challenges they are currently facing — and will continue to face — in 2023.

Organizations continue to struggle with resources as they compete for donors and try to keep up with all of the ways in which donors want to give. From optimizing online giving options and meeting donors where they are to cleaning up and analyzing donor data effectively, there are still areas where nonprofits need to improve their ways.

After all, the nonprofits that are getting ahead are the ones who are investing in fundraising and utilizing strategic plans to reach their fundraising goals. Nonprofits' efforts to get donors' committed to their causes will have a big impact on fundraising outcomes, and, as a result, mission impact.

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5. [“Millions Worldwide Celebrate Giving Tuesday 2022 With Acts of Generosity and Giving.”](#) NonProfit PRO.
6. [“M+R Benchmarks.”](#)
7. [“Follow These 6 Steps to Cultivate a Transformational Gift.”](#) NonProfit PRO.

- 1 **Workforce shortages and hiring difficulties have severely hampered nonprofits as they work to overcome other challenges as well.**
- 2 **Nonprofits are struggling to meet donors where they want to give.**
- 3 **Nonprofits are embracing technology, but still lack the data needed to better donor engagement.**
- 4 **Nonprofits have started to take strategic planning seriously, with more aiming to target major gifts in 2023.**

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# WHO WE ARE

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## NonProfitPRO

NonProfit PRO is the go-to source for nonprofit management and strategy. Developed for thought leaders and innovators, we cover an array of topics focused on leadership management, development, fundraising strategy, technology and much more. We offer a website and daily e-newsletter, NonProfit PRO Today, with a fresh look and quick, hard-hitting content as the go-to source for modern nonprofit professionals. NonProfit PRO also offers a wide range of tools, including a live, multiday conference, webinars, video, custom publishing, research and more.

## NAPCORESEARCH

NAPCO Research crafts custom data-centric solutions that leverage our highly engaged audiences across the markets in which we operate, our industry subject matter experts and in-house research expertise. We partner with our clients to identify their unique business problem and create solutions that enable deeply informed decision-making.

NAPCO Research can help with:

- Business goal prioritization
- Opportunity discovery
- Market segmentation
- Landscape insight
- User needs and wants
- Product features and functionality
- Content marketing strategy
- Sales strategy and tactics
- Market conditions
- Benchmarking
- Industry trends
- Brand awareness

Contact [research@napco.com](mailto:research@napco.com) to talk with our analysts to find out how we can help you with your research needs.



Foundant Technologies has specialized in making philanthropy easier and more impactful through innovative software solutions and exceptional client experiences since 2007. Passionate about philanthropy, our team is dedicated to meeting the unique needs of nonprofits, grantmakers, scholarship providers, and community foundations to enable change-makers to make the world a better place for all.

