

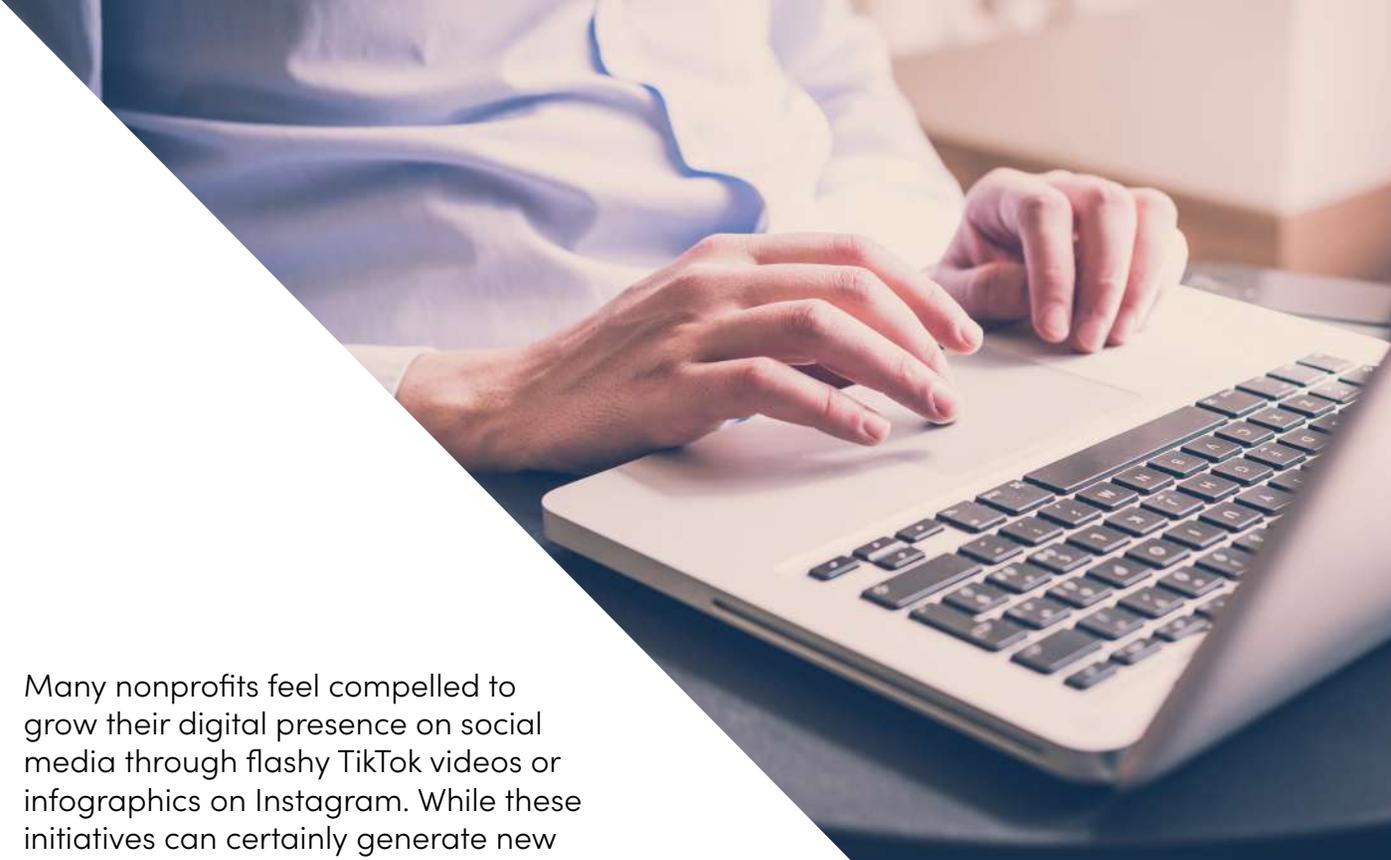


eBook

How to Create Engaging

NONPROFIT EMAIL JOURNEYS

Tips and Examples >



With so many different ways to reach out to supporters, it can be difficult to nail down the perfect communication strategy.

Many nonprofits feel compelled to grow their digital presence on social media through flashy TikTok videos or infographics on Instagram. While these initiatives can certainly generate new clicks and views, **email still remains the best option to directly engage supporters and motivate them to act.**

Email marketing produces the greatest ROI and click rate of comparable outreach channels.

In fact, for every \$1 your organization spends, email earns you **an average of \$36**. This is far more impactful than social media marketing, which has experienced an overall decline in reach due to the complexities and business priorities of these platforms. Recently, Facebook rolled out an algorithm update that reduced many pages' organic reach by **as much as 88%**.

However, email marketing has always stood out as a tried and true option to directly reach supporters with your content and nurture stronger relationships.

To drive results with email, your messages need to truly engage your supporters and keep your mission on their minds. How can you get started?

By crafting email journeys that strategically and consistently catch their attention, drive engagement, and reinforce your brand.

Email is widely preferred by donors, so you've already got a leg up in building long term connections; now, you just need to ensure that your content is able to convert casual readers into avid supporters of your nonprofit.

This guide will cover everything you need to know to get started designing and implementing stellar email journeys for your nonprofit:

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How Do You Create an Email Engagement Strategy?

What's an email journey?

An email journey is a series of email communications you send over a period of time to a specific audience to accomplish a particular objective. These communications can be targeted to any supporter segment and can be designed to encourage them to take a target action or simply help nurture stronger relationships and brand awareness.

The content will vary depending on your nonprofits' unique goals and mission, but every email journey should include a strong call to action (CTA) that offers supporters next steps or a way to get involved. Dedicated email management and design software is a must for creating effective email journeys, as are lists of targeted, usable email addresses.

Most importantly, however, email journeys should consist of strong written and visual content. The content of all emails should including the following **fundamentals**:

- › **A catchy subject line.** Think of a subject line that will encourage people to open up their emails. Express urgency and briefly highlight the main point of your email so supporters know its purpose.
- › **Purposeful content.** Avoid sending your supporters redundant or long-winded messages that lack intention. Your emails should get to the point as quickly as possible and be easy to scan. Use short paragraphs and bolded text to call attention to the most important points.
- › **Storytelling elements.** Tell an impactful story that appeals to readers' emotions and will prompt them to act. Stories can help people understand your nonprofits' work and the tangible impact it has on the community. For example, you can spotlight a constituent's story arc in which their life was improved through their relationship with your organization.
- › **Seamless visual design.** Add images that make your email more engaging and help illuminate its main points. However, refrain from adding too many or oversized images; this can slow their load times and distract people from your content.
- › **A call to action.** Every email should end with how supporters can get involved, whether that's through donating, volunteering, or simply learning more. Include links so accessing their next step is as easy as possible.

Technology also makes it possible to auto-populate your emails with personal details like names and past donation amounts. This gives your messages an added level of personalization and saves you valuable time that can be put back toward advancing your mission.



Why do nonprofits create them?

An email journey can serve several purposes to help your nonprofit expand its reach and drive conversions. Here are a few of the major reasons nonprofits incorporate this tool into their fundraising and engagement strategy:

- **Welcoming donors.** With a welcome journey, your nonprofit will initiate a relationship with potential or new donors. This type of journey will typically include messages like an initial welcome, an explanation of the work your nonprofit does, a story highlighting a constituent, testimonials from past donors and volunteers, a request to set up a recurring donation, and a follow-up to explain the impact of their first gift.
- **Promoting events or campaigns.** To boost participation and revenue for your events or campaigns, you'll need people to know about them. Create an email journey that notifies people about your upcoming event/campaign, provides an overview of the basic details, and asks for support or sign-ups.
- **Soliciting donations.** Email is a great way to encourage people to give more to your organization outside of broader fundraising campaigns. Nonprofits will create a series of emails that include a strong call to action and might spotlight different projects that need funding in each email.
- **Raising awareness.** Nonprofits also send emails to bring more awareness to their cause. These emails help supporters understand the problem at hand and why they should be a part of the solution. These emails could also provide general updates about your nonprofit and efforts it's making to improve the community.

The timeline of each type of campaign may differ. For example, a welcome journey likely lasts a few months, while a journey promoting a specific campaign to a segment of your donors would be bound by the end date of the campaign. A basic newsletter or updates email series often runs indefinitely as new emails are drafted and sent over time.



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What's the value of a great email journey?

An email journey can be an incredibly helpful tool for nonprofits. There are many benefits to focusing your communication strategy on **email marketing**.

- Email creates a personalized experience that makes recipients feel more connected to your organization.
- Email is a nonsynchronous outreach channel, meaning recipients can read your messages when they're ready. Channels like social media, however, bank on your audience happening to see your posts as they quickly scroll through their feeds.
- Email analytics can be easily tracked so you can adjust your content strategy as needed to improve your outreach.
- Email is a great driver for fundraising. In 2021, email drove **15% of online revenue** for nonprofits.

The potential return on investment and boost in donor engagement makes email highly valuable. With a successful email journey, you can turn casual observers of your nonprofit into loyal supporters for the long term.

Are you leaving money on the table? Try [Care2's Email ROI Calculator](#) to measure the current value of your email list!

What are the challenges to expect?

As with any communication strategy, there are some challenges associated with email marketing. An email is only effective when it's opened and read; otherwise, your nonprofit is wasting valuable time and resources.

The biggest challenge in crafting a successful email journey is developing intentional, engaging, and quality content. If your email has mixed messaging, feels too long or is just downright boring, people will quickly click away and ignore your email's call to action.

Another significant challenge with an email journey is making all of your emails part of a cohesive whole. Each individual email should serve a purpose and add to the overall impact of your email journey. If one email isn't as strong as the rest, it can cause supporters to lose interest in your journey and stop reading emails from your organization.

The solution? Mapping out a cohesive email journey strategy and backing it up with content best practices. Let's take a closer look at how to drive email engagement.



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Driving Email Engagement:

5 Essential Elements

Getting people to read your emails and follow through on next steps isn't rocket science, but you do need a plan and understanding of what drives consistent engagement. Incorporate these tips to make your email journeys more engaging.

- 1. Personalization.** Recipients are more likely to read your email and support your organization if they feel valued. Make sure all of your emails address supporters by their names, not generic greetings. Email software integrating with your CRM makes it easy to automatically personalize names and add in other custom elements like past donation amounts.
- 2. Purpose.** Design journeys with specific objectives in mind so that they'll both deliver value for your organization and avoid wasting supporters' time and attention with unfocused messages. Include straightforward CTAs in every email you send, in most cases linking readers straight back to a page on your website. You can also proactively use email journeys to support other organizational objectives, like boosting newsletter signups, social follows, monthly donation upgrades, and more.
- 3. Consistency.** Use consistent, clear branding and tone in your messaging. Every email should feel like it was sent by your organization. If an email reads differently than usual, you may lose your supporters' interest and miss out on traction in your email journey. Make sure each email follows a similar format and has the same voice.
- 4. User-Friendliness.** Make the purpose of your emails clear from the subject lines. They can be bold, but not misleading. You want to grab people's attention and maintain their trust, so avoid using clickbait. Ensure emails are mobile optimized so they're quickly downloaded and easily accessible on any device. You'll also need to provide easily-identifiable unsubscribe options.
- 5. Impactful Design.** Create eye-catching (but always relevant and mobile-friendly) visuals for your emails. Use design choices to reinforce your brand and tell stories with graphics, photos, infographics, embedded video, and more. Choose visuals that will appeal to people's emotions—this can help motivate people to act.

Anatomy of a NONPROFIT EMAIL JOURNEY

Once you've decided your nonprofit wants to create a nonprofit email journey, determine what you want it to accomplish. This will help guide a few crucial parameters:

- › Your audience or the specific segment of your email list that will receive the emails
- › The journey's duration and frequency, which will depend on the journey's purpose
- › The trigger action that will initiate the journey—either manually begun by your nonprofit or triggered by supporters taking specific actions on your website

Here's an example outline of an email journey designed to encourage recurring donations from one-time donors:

Audience: One-time donors who are active (or gave within the past six months)

Duration/frequency: 5 emails sent over 5 weeks

Trigger: Manually launched once the journey and email lists are finalized

Email 1: Here's what your donation of \$X did for our community.

Email 2: Don't miss an update! Sign up for the community newsletter.

Email 3: What our mission means—here's what we're up against.

Email 4: Can we count on your support in our next campaign?

Email 5: Drive year-round change with a monthly donation of just \$X.

This series of emails follows a clear trajectory—recognizing the impact of donors' first gifts, encouraging more engagement and awareness, and building up to a request for sustained support. Although the emails may include links to the nonprofit's donation form, each separate message has a clear purpose and would feature a more prominent call to action for readers to learn more on the nonprofit's website, sign up for the main newsletter, and (eventually) set up a recurring donation.



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Nonprofit Welcome Email Journeys

Let's take a closer look at one of the most common nonprofit email journeys. A welcome email journey is targeted specifically to new donors or new contacts.

When someone makes the decision to donate or receive information from your nonprofit, you want to continue this momentum and retain them as loyal supporters. Or, if you work with an email appends provider like [Care2](#) to source email addresses of potential supporters with a proven interest in your cause, you need a way to introduce yourself and encourage engagement. A welcome journey is designed specifically to accomplish these tasks.

There's no one right way to create a welcome journey. The duration and number of emails it includes can vary based on the context and the target actions you're looking to facilitate. The first email, however, should always be an initial introduction to your organization (and a thank you, if you're reaching out to new donors). The following emails should include a series of messages to drive awareness of your mission and work. You can also use this opportunity to promote upcoming events, campaigns, and opportunities to get more involved, including donating—just don't jump straight into asking for a first or next gift.

Here are some example emails from the beginning, middle, and end of a welcome journey targeting newly-acquired contacts.



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Anatomy of a Welcome Journey:

Initial Email

Subject Line: Learn How YOU Can Support the Ocean Today!

Dear "Supporter's Name,"

We're a passionate nonprofit with a big mission: to advocate for clean oceans and the stricter enforcement of protections for marine mammals. Are you interested in joining thousands of others who believe in a brighter future for marine wildlife? As part of this movement, you'll receive opportunities to make a difference in marine conservation and be at the forefront of the environmental movement.

Together we can restore life to our oceans. Click the button below to find out how you can get involved.

[Button] Learn How You Can #RestoreOurOceans

- > Sign up for our monthly newsletter
- > Follow our organization on social media
- > Read our blog

Sincerely,
Organization Name



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While there are many ways to craft a successful welcome email, this example uses the following best practices that you should incorporate:

- › **Provide a heartfelt introduction to your organization.** The recipient of this type of email isn't yet familiar with your nonprofit. Describe your mission and the problem your nonprofit is working to solve. This way, prospective supporters can immediately understand your connection to their passion and get further invested in your cause.
- › **Make supporters feel like they're part of a community.** Show people right away that you value their interest and engagement. Let people know that when they support your organization, they're joining a community of like-minded people working towards a better future..
- › **Use a friendly and welcoming tone.** A friendly voice helps humanize your organization and makes people feel immediately welcome. Employ a tone that is both inviting and consistent with the rest of your organization's brand voice.
- › **Mention the frequency of your emails.** It's a good idea to let recipients know how often they might expect an email from you. You don't want to overwhelm them with too many messages or lose their attention by sending them too sparsely; find a balance between the two to engage your audience.
- › **Provide easy next steps.** While you don't want to push people into donating right away, you can offer simple next steps to drive engagement like signing up for your monthly newsletter, following you on social media, or simply visiting your website. Provide a clear, prominent button that will take recipients directly to your website (where they can choose to donate if they already feel inspired).



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Anatomy of a Welcome Journey:

Middle Email

Now that you've introduced yourself to prospective supporters, why not ask them to introduce themselves? Email is an unobtrusive way to collect more information about your contacts since they'll be able to easily choose when and if they'd like to participate. Here's a sample email on getting to know your donors.

Subject Line: Tell Us All About YOUR Interests in the Ocean!

Dear "Supporter's Name,"

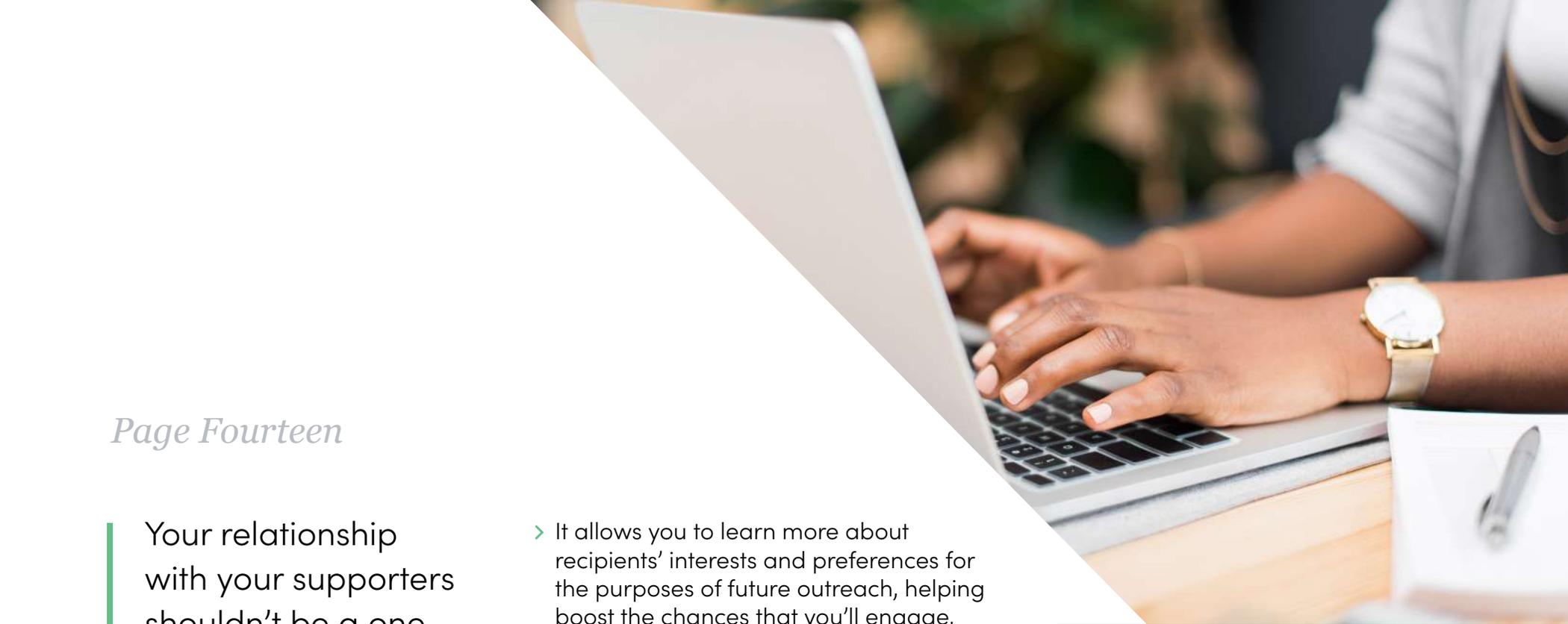
We love to show off our organization's unwavering commitment to restoring ocean ecosystems. And we hope you've been able to learn a lot about our marine policy advocacy and on-the-ground efforts to clean up our oceans. Now, we want to learn a little more about your priorities as an ocean advocate!

Please consider completing this brief survey to help us learn more about your environmental passions and interest in our organization. Tell us all about what kind of change you want to see so we can pair you with the best opportunities to take action.

[Button] Tell Us About You

We can't wait to learn more about you!

Sincerely,
Organization Name



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Your relationship with your supporters shouldn't be a one-way street! Using your welcome journey as an opportunity to gather more information about recipients brings a few valuable benefits:

- It allows you to learn more about recipients' interests and preferences for the purposes of future outreach, helping boost the chances that you'll engage, convert, and retain them down the line.
- It makes engaged recipients feel valued and listened to. If a reader is already feeling a connection to your nonprofit and has learned more about you, receiving this kind of message can help further strengthen the relationship.
- It can show recipients all of the different ways to get involved that they may not have yet been aware of. By asking readers to rank or select opportunities, you can show them the full range of options they have for driving impact—donating, volunteering for specific programs, serving as an online advocate, hosting a peer-to-peer fundraiser, etc.

Including a survey towards the middle of your welcome journey can be a smart way to gather valuable information about the recipients who are most engaged with your messages. Plus, giving recipients the opportunity to talk about themselves can help them feel like they're truly a part of your nonprofit's community.

Anatomy of a Welcome Journey:

Final Email

Once you've reached the end of your nonprofit email journey, summarize the important information you've shared with supporters while nudging them toward a concrete next action that takes their involvement to the next level. Here's a sample email to wrap up your journey:

Subject Line: Join OUR Mission to Save the Oceans!

Dear "Supporter's Name,"

We're so proud of our community of ocean advocates. Their support has allowed our organization to make significant strides in the environmental movement since our founding, and they've pushed major policy changes forward at the national level. Here's a recap of our major accomplishments since our organization was founded nearly two decades ago:

- We've helped advance over 100 pieces of legislation to protect coral reefs.
- We launched a wide scale ocean clean-up effort in the Great Barrier Reef region that removed thousands of pounds of trash.
- We helped halt offshore drilling in 3 critically threatened areas.

While we have made some great strides, we still have a lot to accomplish. Every day, coral reefs are inching closer towards extinction and marine species are dying at an alarming rate.

A donation as small as \$5 a month can fuel our efforts, both on-the-ground clean-ups and policy advancements at the national and global levels. Can we count on you to save our oceans and give today?

[Button] Become a Sustaining Supporter

With the help of ocean advocates like yourself, we can make our dreams of restoring the oceans a reality. You can be a part of the story and the solution.

Sincerely,
Organization's Name

Your final email in your welcome series should end on a high note and drive an impactful target action. When making your final email content, incorporate these best practices:

- › **Thank recipients for their time.** Expressing gratitude goes a long way in pulling in more support. Thank recipients for their attention and learning about your organization. Maintain the same friendly tone from your earlier emails.
- › **Provide a recap.** If you've sent several emails in your welcome series, chances are that recipients might not have read through all of them. Recapping your organization's mission, history, and accomplishments allows recipients to further familiarize themselves with your nonprofit and why it's a worthy cause to support.
- › **Request a donation.** At this point, you've taken the time to build awareness and recognition among your readers, so asking for a donation is an appropriate next step. Make a strong call to action by using active voice, creating urgency, and giving a concrete next step such as signing up for recurring giving or donating a suggested amount.

There are many ways you can frame your content, but most importantly, you need to appeal to your audience's emotions. Make sure they understand the gravity of the problem at hand and why they have to be a part of the solution. Adding impactful visuals can drive this point home and turn them into avid supporters.

How Do You Create an Email Engagement Strategy?

An effective email campaign must be backed up with plenty of prepwork and forethought. Your email journeys need to be designed, rolled out, and managed as part of an overarching strategy, not on an ad hoc basis.

Use these steps to develop an email engagement strategy that will not only compel people to read your emails, but encourage them to take action:



1. Understand your audiences and objectives.



2. Ensure you're working with a solid tech foundation.



3. Study up on relevant compliance necessities.



4. Secure third-party data and email sources.



5. Identify and create your foundational email journeys.



6. Identify and create secondary or more specific email journeys.



7. Launch your journeys to start engaging your supporters.



8. Be prepared to maintain and improve your journeys.



9. Prioritize data hygiene.



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1. Understand your audiences and objectives.

The purpose of an email journey is to encourage a segmented audience to act. Determine which audience you want to reach, whether that's brand new contacts, new donors, volunteers, etc. Then, figure out the action you want them to take. Your email journey needs to have an overall purpose, and each email along the way should help push recipients towards fulfilling that purpose.

2. Ensure you're working with a solid tech foundation.

There are a number of tools and resources you'll need to succeed with email:

- › Your own data, or email addresses you've collected
- › Clean, reliable third-party email lists of contacts with a proven affinity for your mission (more on this below)
- › A CRM or database to house and manage the data
- › Email marketing and automation software to design and manage your journeys
- › An email service provider (ESP) to facilitate your messages

Ideally, your email tools will integrate with your CRM. This allows for the seamless flow of segmented email lists into the email software and of engagement data back into your database.

Learn more about building your email list and the role of third-party data with [our guide to nonprofit email marketing](#).



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3. Study up on relevant compliance necessities.

Your nonprofit should be up to date on all data privacy regulations so that your nonprofit is running a fully compliant, legal, and ethical email campaign. Additionally, this will ensure that supporters feel confident submitting information about themselves.

You'll want to strictly follow the big three regulations: [CAN-SPAM](#), [GDPR](#), and [CCPA](#). For nonprofits, your bases are generally covered by first understanding and adhering to [opt-in consent best practices](#) and working only with data vendors who themselves are GDPR and CCPA-compliant. However, you should always do your due diligence to understand and comply with these laws.

This is important to not only protect your own nonprofit's legal standing and reputation, but it will also help to ensure that email service providers don't inadvertently flag your nonprofit as spam, which can cause serious harm to your email results and investments.

4. Secure third-party data and email sources.

In order for your nonprofit to grow, you'll need to conduct outreach to a lot of people, meaning that you'll need plenty of email addresses to contact. It can be expensive and time-consuming to amass all of these emails on your own.

Instead, you can work with a third-party service like [Care2](#) that can curate clean lists of potential supporters interested in your cause. The best email acquisition sources can be valuable, ROI-boosting partners for your email journeys and outreach strategies.



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5. Identify and create your foundational email journeys.

Once you've identified the audience and objectives you want to achieve, you're ready to get started on creating your foundational content. Some general email journeys that will always serve your nonprofit well include welcome, thank-you, general annual solicitation, and reactivation series.

As you develop the content of a journey, start by developing the first and last messages. This will help you keep a sharp focus on the goal at hand as you fill in the blanks with additional messages that will steward readers towards taking the target action by the end of the journey.

6. Identify and create secondary or more specific email journeys

Once you've mastered a handful of foundational journeys, make your email strategy even more impactful by targeting more specific goals. For example, you can create journeys focused on event promotions, campaign-specific promotions, monthly giving upgrades, membership signups, advocacy actions, and mid-level donor stewardship.

For these types of more specific campaigns, make sure you have a thorough understanding of your intended audience and double-check your segmentation strategies to ensure as high an ROI as possible.



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7. Launch your journeys to start engaging your supporters.

Send out your initial email with the help of your tech. Choose an ideal date and time that will prompt the most clicks; for example, people might be more likely to open their personal email if they receive it during their lunch break on a weekday. Decide on a timeline for your additional emails and space them out appropriately.

8. Be prepared to maintain and improve your journeys.

Even though your email campaign is live, there's still important work that can be done to optimize the journey.

Monitor reporting and analytics from your emails, such as open rate, clickthrough rate, conversion rate, and number of unsubscribes. You can also perform A/B testing, a process in which you'll send two versions of the same email with slight changes to two subsets of your audience and see which one performs best. Based on your analytics, you can update email content, create new journeys, and review and adjust segmentation strategies over time.

9. Prioritize data hygiene.

Clean data is critical to maximizing your ROI and tailoring your email journeys to your audience. This means that your email lists should be error-free and carefully organized so you can deliver a personalized and engaging experience for your recipients. Take care to maintain the hygiene of your first-party email data, and if you are using a third-party vendor, ensure that they follow strict hygiene standards, as well. This will help to ensure deliverability and maximize your reach.

Wrapping Up:

The Power of Email

Effective email journeys can be powerful assets for your nonprofit. They'll help you strengthen your relationships with donors and volunteers, effortlessly keep your mission on their minds, convert casual observants of your organization into avid supporters, and boost your revenue so your nonprofit can achieve its goals.

Before you begin, identify your audience and the overall purpose of your first email journey. Then, create quality, straightforward content over a period of time that will motivate them to act. A successful email journey can convert thousands of people into supporters of your organization, but you need to be able to reach these people with the right messages at the right times to succeed

And remember, an expert partner like [Care2](#) can give your email strategies an immediate leg-up. Care2 delivers fresh and engaged email addresses from people who are guaranteed to feel passionate about your cause. [Contact us today](#) to learn more about Care2's offerings—we look forward to hearing from you!