EMAIL COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

From audience to community: How to build relationships that last.

Organized by the Goethe-Institut
Facilitated by Vanessa von Hilchen

GOETHE INSTITUT

Before we start.

60 minutes
Email Communication for strong communities

Questions are welcome
Please use the chat

Recording
This session will be recorded

Materials
Slides and worksheets will be shared afterward

What we'll cover today.

Community & Relationships

What makes a community and how communication helps relationships grow over time.

01

Role of Email

Why email remains such a powerful channel for nonprofits and where it fits in the relationship journey.

02

Email Types

Newsletters and more and how segmentation makes communication more relevant.

03

Crafting emails

How to structure, write and design emails people actually want to read and act on.

04

Automation & Tools

How small teams can use automation and simple tools to communicate consistently and efficiently

05

Measurement

Which metrics matter, how to evaluate success, and what to improve before your next send.

06

What makes a community?

A community is a network of people who recognize your organization, feel connected to its purpose, interact with it repeatedly, and see a meaningful role for themselves within it.



Identity

People understand what the organization stands for and feel that its mission, values, or community is relevant to them.

Relationships

Trust grows through repeated interactions, with the organization, but also with the people around it.

Participation

People have meaningful ways to contribute, respond, attend, volunteer, share, or shape what happens next.

Belonging

People feel recognized and included, and the relationship continues beyond a single event, donation, or interaction.

The Power of Email

Email gives organizations a direct, reliable way to stay connected with people over time, beyond algorithms, fleeting attention, or a single interaction.

DIRECT

You can reach people without waiting for an algorithm to distribute your message.

INTENTIONAL

Someone has usually made an active decision to subscribe, register, join or engage.

PERSONAL

Email arrives in one-to-one environment, even when it is send to thousands of people.

CONTINOUS

It allows communication to continue over time.

Email still matters...

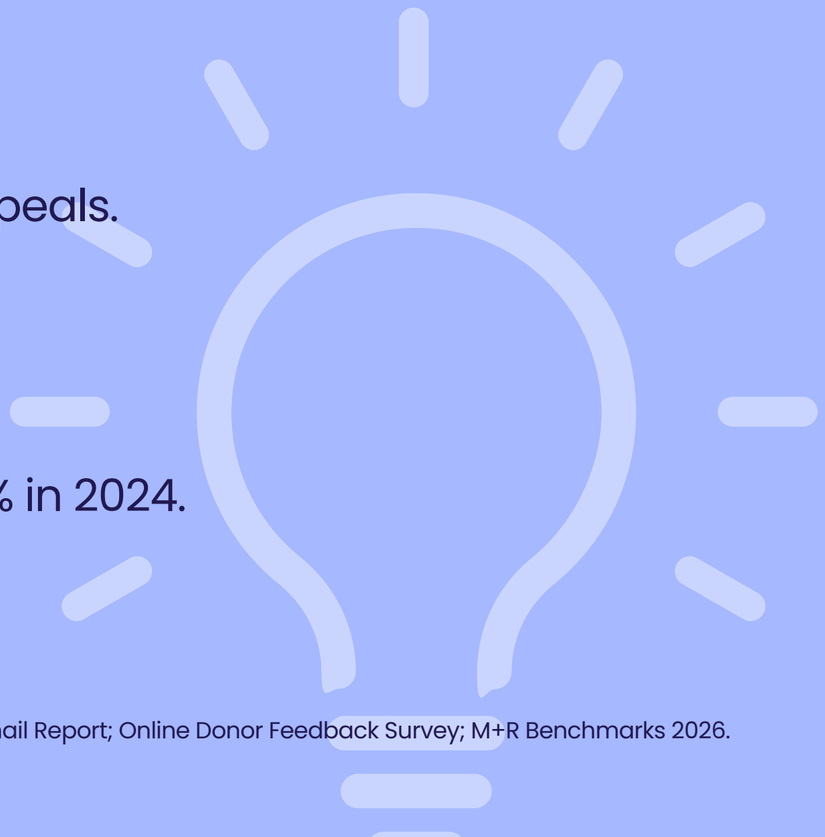
83%
of nonprofits use email marketing.

46%
of those nonprofits send a newsletter monthly.

48%
of donors say email is their preferred way to receive updates and appeals.

33%
of donors say email is the channel that most inspires them to give.

16%
of all online nonprofit revenue came from email in 2025 — up from 11% in 2024.



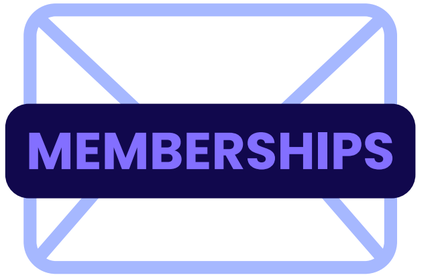
Sources: 2026 Nonprofit Tech for Good Report; Neon One Nonprofit Email Report; Online Donor Feedback Survey; M+R Benchmarks 2026.

WE ALL LIVE IN OUR INBOXES.





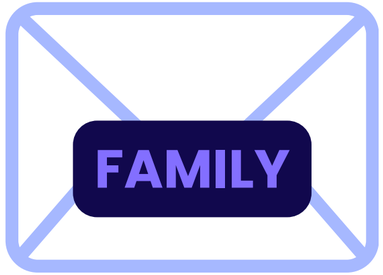




BUT THE INBOX IS CROWDED.









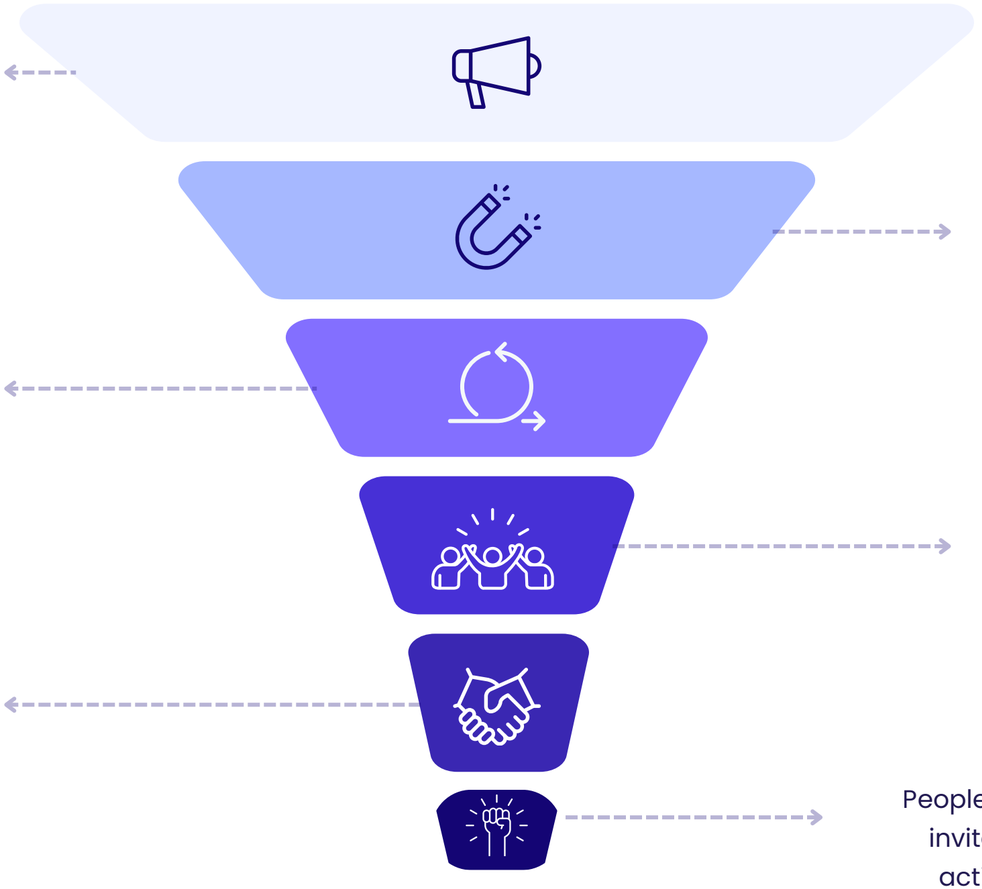
How can we send information that people actually want to receive?

NONPROFIT FUNNEL

The full journey from broad awareness to loyal advocacy.

Awareness

People encounter your organization for the first time.



Interest

They stop, click, follow, visit your website, or look for more information.

Recognition

Repeated contact creates familiarity. Your organization becomes recognizable.

Participation

They register, attend, subscribe, reply, volunteer, join a program, or take another meaningful action.

Trust

Positive experiences, consistency, transparency, and follow-up deepen the relationship.

Advocacy

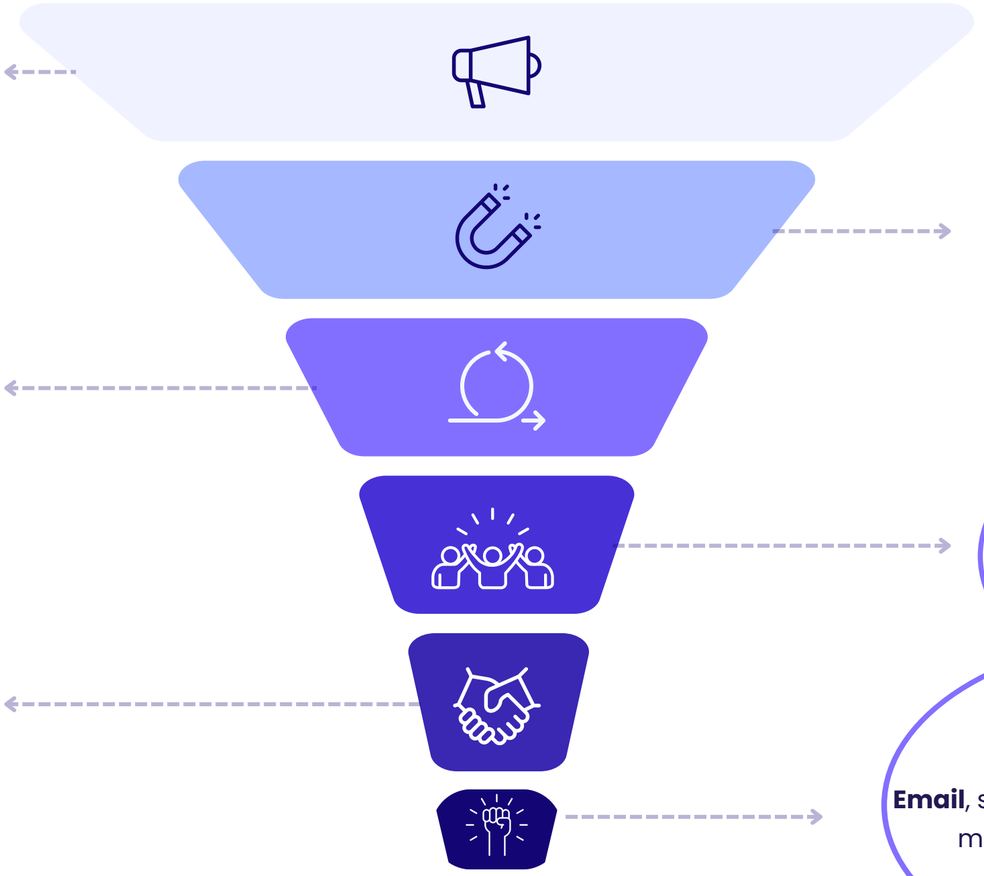
People recommend you, share your work, invite others, speak on your behalf, or actively strengthen the community.

NONPROFIT FUNNEL

Different Channels. Different Strengths.

Awareness

Social media, PR, search, partnerships, events, word of mouth



Interest

Social media, website, search, video, landing pages

Recognition

Social media, repeated content, **email/newsletters**, events

Participation

Email, website, event platforms, social media, personal outreach

Trust

Email, direct communication, events, community spaces, personal relationships

Advocacy

Email, social media, in-person community, member networks, peer-to-peer communication

Newsletters = recurring relationship communication
Deliver regular updates, stories, resources, upcoming events, impact highlights, or curated content that keeps your community informed and maintains an ongoing relationship.

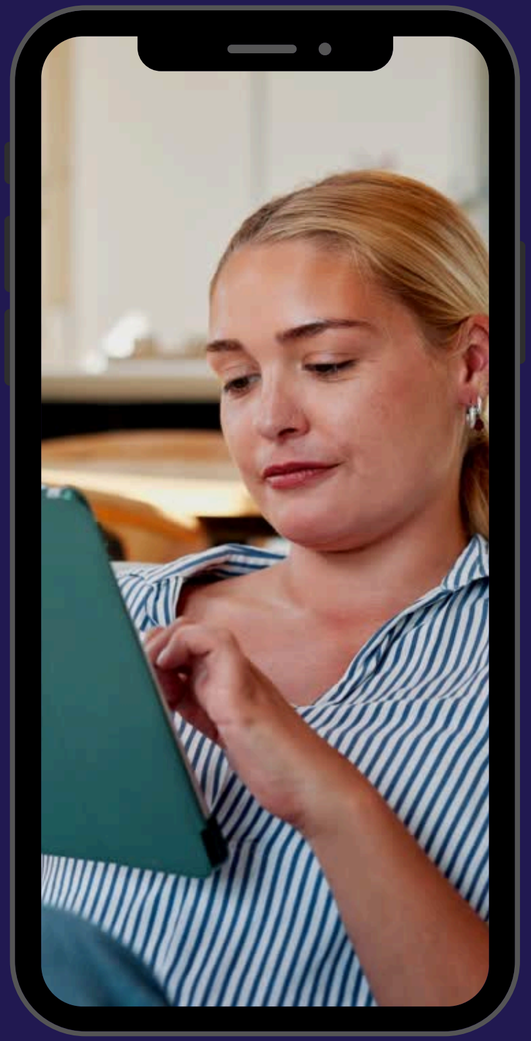
Transactional Emails = operational communication
Triggered by a practical transaction or administrative step and used to provide reassurance, clarity, and next-step information.

Campaign Emails = one goal, one primary action
Focus on a clear ask such as registering, donating, volunteering, renewing a membership, attending an event, signing a petition, or applying to a program.

Behavioral Emails = lifecycle communication
Triggered by a person's behavior, engagement, or relationship stage to make communication more relevant and timely.

Common Nonprofit Email Types

Lifecycle Emails









NEW SUBSCRIBER
Welcome email · What to expect · First ways to get involved
EVENT PARTICIPATION
Confirmation · Reminder · Practical information · Follow-up
ENGAGEMENT
Clicked on volunteering · Registered for a program · Donated · Attended repeatedly
RELATIONSHIP MILESTONE
New member · Membership renewal · Volunteer anniversary · First donation
INACTIVITY
No opens or clicks · Lapsed member · Past participant · Re-engagement

Good email programs are built around meaningful moments, not just mailing dates.

Newsletter



COMMUNITY UPDATES
Upcoming events · Organizational news · Important dates · Practical information

STORIES & IMPACT
Member stories · Volunteer spotlights · Program highlights · Results and milestones

USEFUL CONTENT
Resources · Tips · Recommendations · Educational content · Curated links

WAYS TO PARTICIPATE
Events · Volunteer opportunities · Membership · Surveys · Calls for input

RECOGNITION
Thank-yous · Community highlights · Celebrating contributions · Partner or member features

A good newsletter gives people a reason to stay connected — not just another reason to check their inbox.

Building a high quality email list

Laying the Foundation with the Right Audience



1. MAKE THE VALUE CLEAR
Give people a specific reason to subscribe.
“Sign up for our newsletter” is weaker than explaining what they will actually receive.

2. ASK FOR PERMISSION
People should knowingly choose to hear from you. Be transparent about what they are signing up for and avoid adding contacts without a clear expectation.

3. COLLECT CONTACTS AT MEANINGFUL MOMENTS
Useful touchpoints include event registrations, membership forms, volunteer sign-ups, website forms, QR codes, and in-person events.

4. KEEP THE LIST HEALTHY
Remove invalid addresses, watch inactive contacts, and make it easy for people to update preferences or unsubscribe.



Healthy lists need active engagement

50 emails

Average number of messages sent per nonprofit subscriber in 2025.

+5%

Average email list growth in 2025.

12%

of subscribers unsubscribed during the year.

4%

became non-deliverable due to bouncing.

Only 34%

of nonprofits regularly delete unengaged subscribers.

Only 14%

run dedicated re-engagement campaigns.



Sources: M+R Benchmarks 2026; 2026 Nonprofit Tech for Good Report; Nonprofit Communications Trends Report.

Sending less, more relevantly

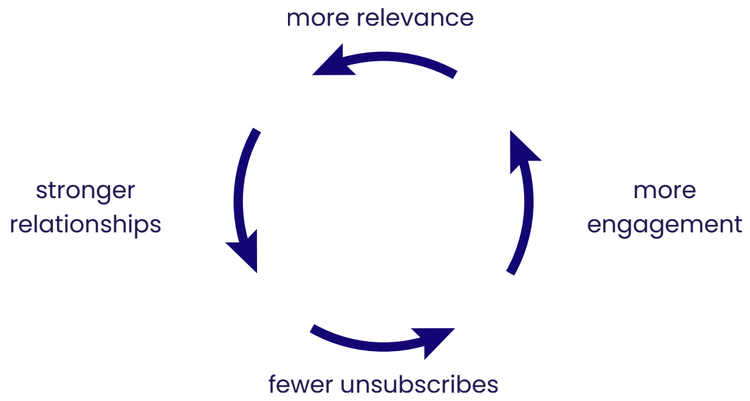
Segmentation means dividing your email list into smaller groups based on what makes the communication relevant to them. Instead of sending every message to everyone, you match the email to the person's relationship, interests, behavior, or needs.

Relationship

Members · Volunteers · Donors · Event attendees · Partners · Prospective members

Interests

Programs · Events · Education · Advocacy · Volunteering · Fundraising



Behavior

Opened · Clicked · Registered · Donated · Attended · Inactive

Needs

New subscriber · Active participant · Repeat supporter · Lapsed member

What makes email work?

What makes email work is not simply what we send, but whether the message feels relevant, arrives at the right moment, and gives the reader something worth their attention.

RELEVANCE

The closer the content matches their interests, relationship, or needs, the more likely they are to engage.

TIMING

Reaching people when the information is useful, actionable, or top of mind.

VALUE

What does the reader get from opening this email?



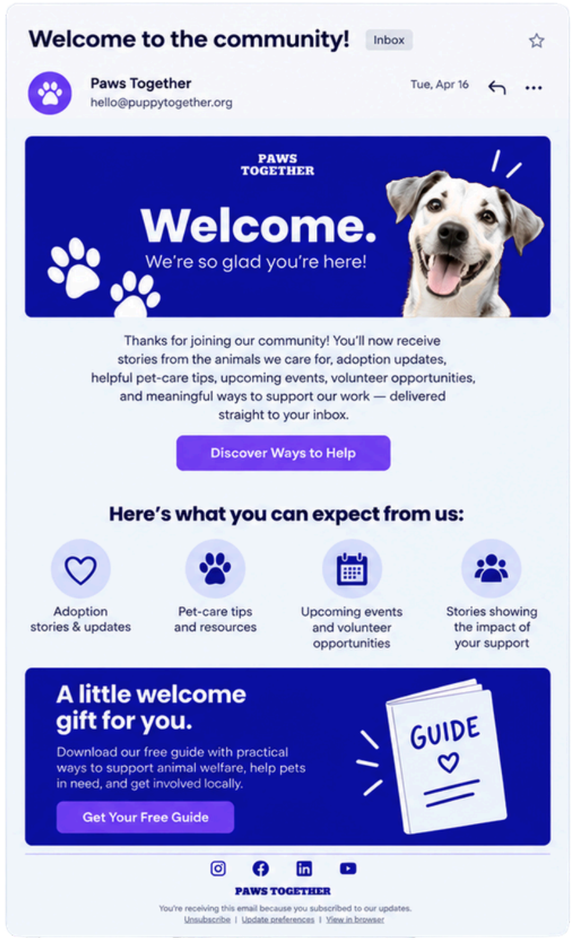


Writing Emails That People Actually Read

Crafting good emails starts with understanding what matters to your audience. Strong subject lines earn attention, clear and concise content makes the message easy to understand, and a focused call to action shows people what to do next. Personalization, useful content, and an authentic tone help build trust and make your emails feel relevant rather than promotional.

Crafting Engaging Emails

Anatomy of a Strong Email





Subject Line: Create curiosity or urgency, but stay honest — the subject line should make a clear promise the email actually delivers.

Pre Header: Use it as a second hook: add context, tease the value inside, or reinforce why opening the email is worth it.

Opening / Intro: Start with the most human or relevant angle, e.g. a moment, question, insight, or need that makes the reader want to continue.

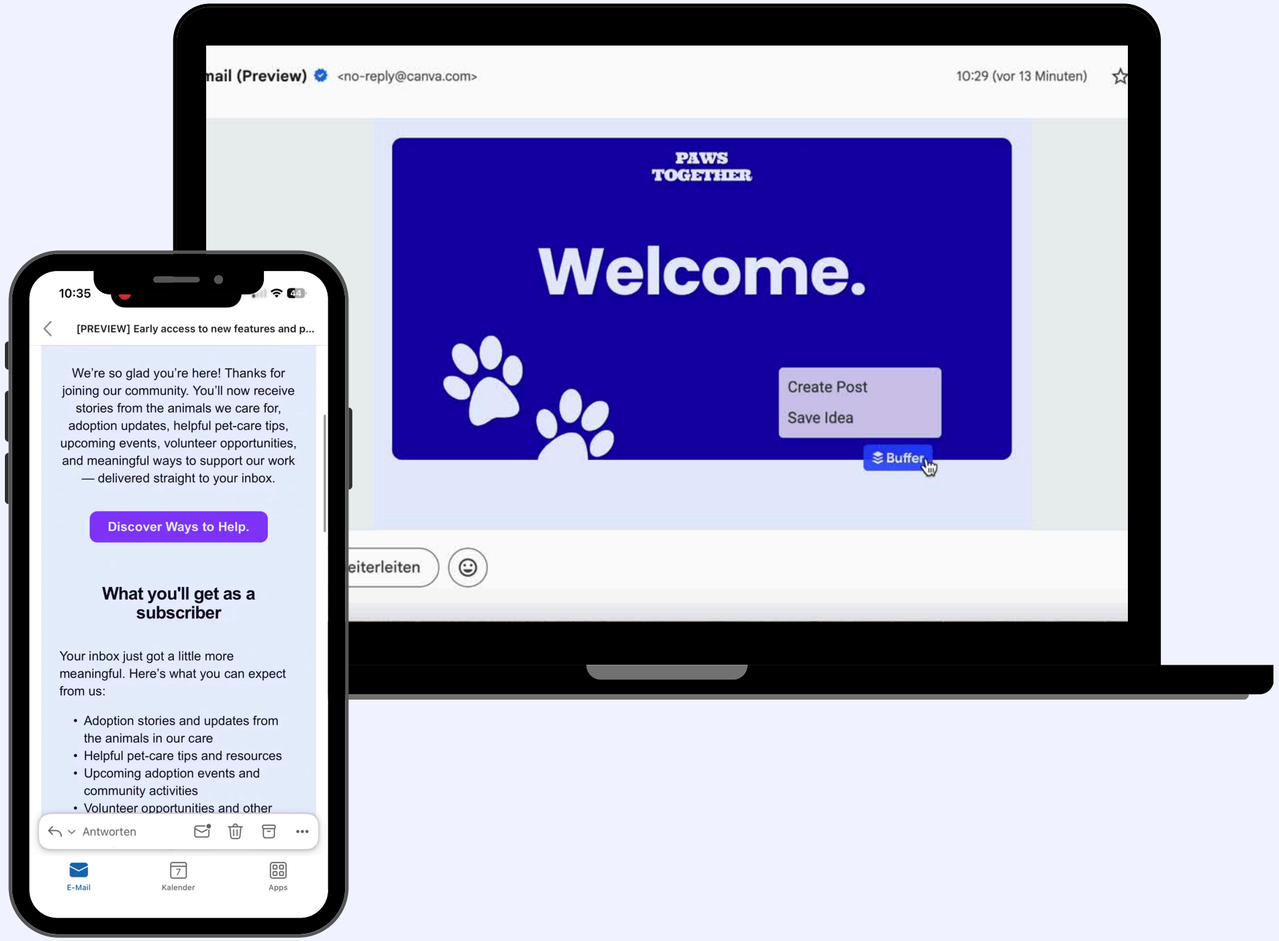
Main Message / Body: Keep the core content focused, useful, and easy to understand without unnecessary detail.

Message Hierarchy: Guide the eye through the story in the right order: what should stop me, what should I understand, and what should I do next?

Call to Action: Give readers clear, specific next steps and make them easy to find.

Footer: End with trust. Make it clear who you are, how people can reach you, and how they can manage their relationship with your organization.

Before you hit *Send...*



...yourself a test email:

- Check how it actually looks in the inbox, not just in the editor.
- Check mobile first
- Test every link and button
- Check sender name, subject line, and preheader together
- Read it once for clarity
- Check the CTA
- Proofread names, dates, times, and locations
- Check accessibility basics

Small choices can make big differences

80%

Average reported open rate for welcome emails.

53%

of email is opened on a mobile device.

67%

of nonprofits use segmented email lists.

63%

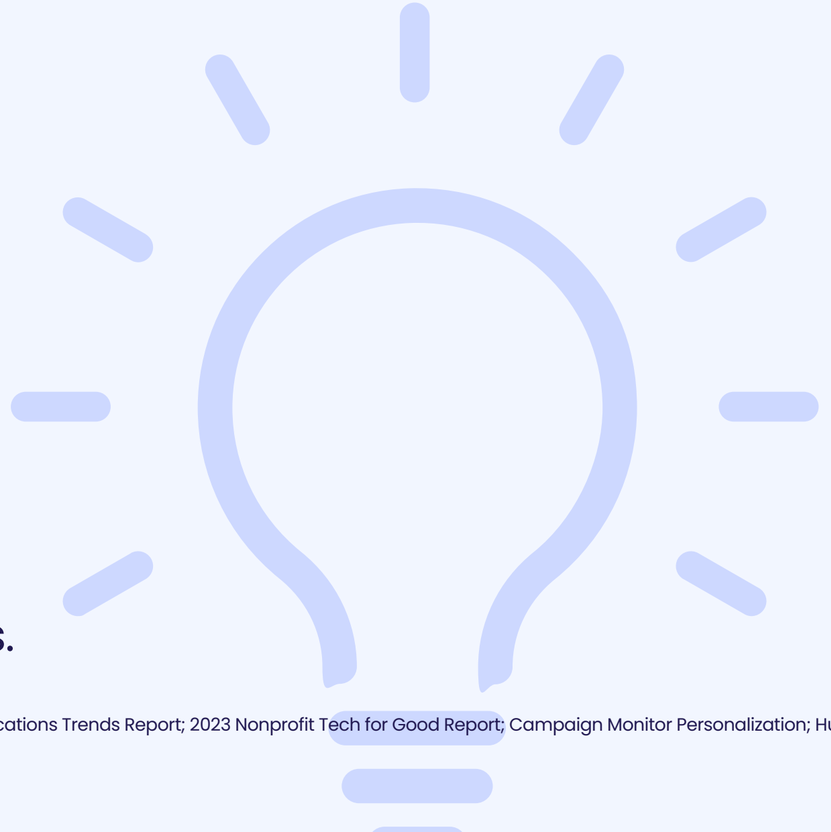
use personalization in their email marketing.

26% higher opens

for emails with personalized subject lines.

202% higher conversion

reported for personalized calls to action compared with default CTAs.



Sources: Mailmodo Welcome Email Statistics; Campaign Monitor; Nonprofit Communications Trends Report; 2023 Nonprofit Tech for Good Report; Campaign Monitor Personalization; HubSpot.

The Benefits of Email Automation

Automation helps small teams communicate more consistently without making communication feel less personal.

1

SAVE TIME
Automate repetitive messages such as welcome emails, confirmations, reminders, and follow-ups

2

BE MORE CONSISTENT
Make sure important communication happens reliably, even when your team is busy.

3

IMPROVE TIMING
Send messages when they are most relevant, right after a signup, before an event, or when a renewal is due.

4

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS
Create more thoughtful follow-up and continuity without having to manage every contact manually.

How Automation works for Nonprofits

TRIGGER

Something happens.
Example: someone subscribes, registers for an event, donates, or becomes inactive.

RULE

The system checks who the person is or what applies to them.
Example: new subscriber, donor, member, volunteer, no activity for 90 days.

EMAIL

A predefined message is sent automatically.
Example: welcome email, reminder, thank-you, follow-up.

TIMING

The message can be sent immediately or after a delay.
Example: instantly, after two days, one week before renewal.

NEXT STEP

The person's response can trigger another action.
Example: clicked → send more information; registered → stop reminder; inactive → re-engagement.

Tools
A Simple Nonprofit Email Stack

Mailchimp / Brevo

- Templates
- Contact management
- Segmentation
- Scheduling
- Automation
- Analytics

SalesForce (NP)

- Relationship history
- Membership/donor/ volunteer data
- Participation
- Follow-up
- Segmentation

Canva

- Design your emails and newsletters

Google Forms

- Surveys
- Feedbacks
- Forms

Email Communication Metrics

Not every metric matters equally.
Choose the metrics that are closest to the goal of the email.



DELIVERY

Delivery Rate Percentage of emails successfully delivered
Bounce Rate
Emails that could not be delivered
Spam Complaints
Recipients who marked the email as spam



ATTENTION

Open Rate
Percentage of recipients who opened the email

Click-Through Rate (CTR)
Percentage who clicked a link



CONVERSION

Conversion Rate
Percentage who completed the desired action (Registration, Donation, Signing Up)



RELATIONSHIP

Unsubscribe Rate
Percentage who leave your list
List Growth Rate
How quickly your subscriber base is growing
Inactive Subscribers
People who have stopped engaging
Retention
People who continue to participate over time

Practical Tips

USE A RECOGNIZABLE SENDER NAME

People should immediately know who the email is from. Consistency builds recognition and trust.

WRITE THE SUBJECT LINE LAST

Once the email is finished, it is much easier to summarize its strongest reason to open.

GIVE EACH EMAIL ONE MAIN JOB

Decide what the most important message or action is before adding secondary content.

MAKE YOUR CTA SPECIFIC

“Register for the event” or “Meet the adoptable dogs” is more useful than a generic “Learn more.”

MAKE REPLIES POSSIBLE

Whenever appropriate, send from an address people can actually respond to. A reply can be more valuable for relationship-building than another click.

TEST THE ENTIRE JOURNEY

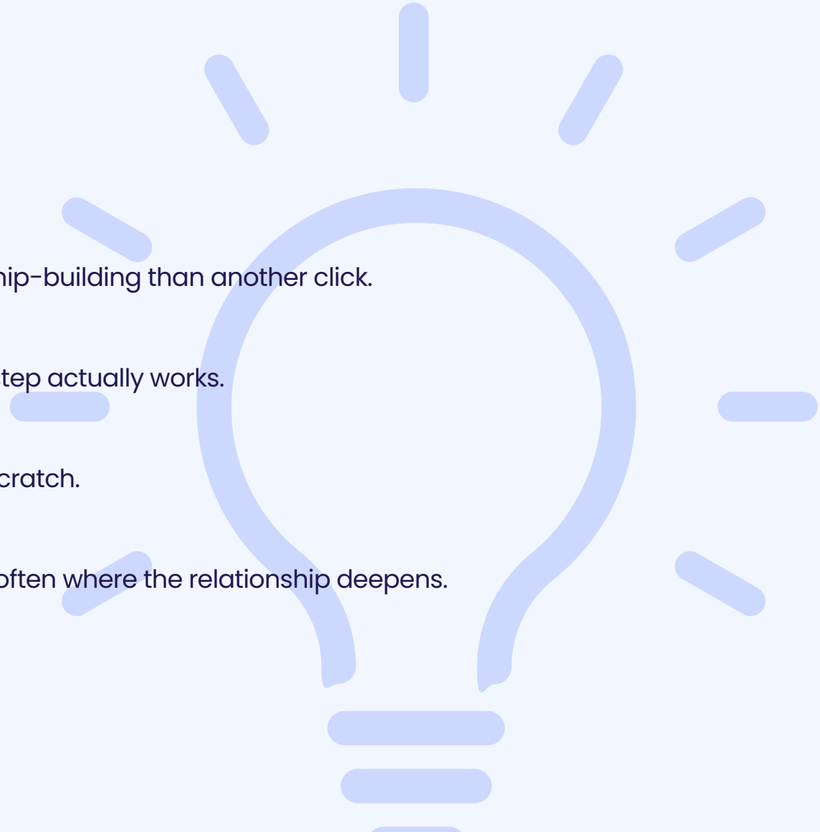
Don’t just test the email. Click through the registration, donation, signup, or event process yourself and make sure the next step actually works.

CREATE REUSABLE TEMPLATES

Build a few strong templates for newsletters, invitations, reminders, and follow-ups instead of designing every email from scratch.

FOLLOW UP AFTER THE ACTION

Registration, attendance, volunteering, or donating should not be the end of the communication. A thoughtful follow-up is often where the relationship deepens.



SESSION 4

Website, Visibility, and Measuring What Matters

November 4, 2026, 11 a.m. CDT

THANK YOU!

