

Mission Retainable

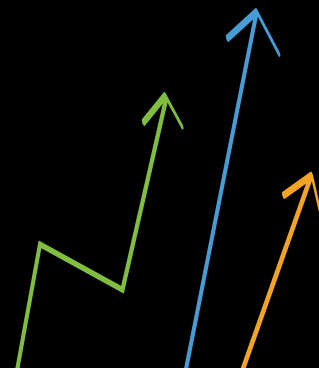
Research-backed strategies
to inspire **donor loyalty**



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Why donor retention is the future of fundraising



Retention is more than a metric—it's the lifeblood of nonprofit sustainability. It's what turns fleeting generosity into lasting relationships and one-time gifts into enduring impact.

This guide offers actionable strategies and invites you to rethink how donor retention can transform your nonprofit. In November 2024, we surveyed over 380 fundraisers and 1,000 donors to better understand the challenges and opportunities in donor retention. Their insights revealed a clear disconnect: donors often give because they feel connected to a mission, but many nonprofits struggle to keep that connection strong after the first gift.

Imagine a future where donors are more than contributors—they're advocates who champion your mission, encourage others to join, and stay actively involved. This future is within reach. It starts with understanding the unique value each donor brings and using insights to build authentic, lasting relationships.



The retention disconnect

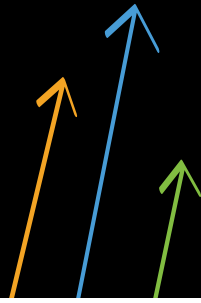
Survey findings reveal that while **63%** of donors give because they feel connected to the mission, retention rates remain stagnant.

Why retention matters now

Economic pressures, competition for attention, and rising donor expectations make it harder—and more important—than ever to keep supporters engaged. When every dollar and every connection counts, retention offers nonprofits a clear path to sustainability.

Retention isn't about holding on; it's about moving forward together. Let's reimagine what's possible when we put relationships at the center of fundraising.

Why donor retention matters



Donor retention is the heartbeat of nonprofit success, but for years, retention rates have hovered around 43%, with first-time donor retention rates dipping as low as 19%. Keeping donors engaged over the long term requires more than good intentions—it demands intentionality, strategy, and an effort to maintain the connection that drives ongoing support.



The financial case for retention

Retention delivers significant ROI. Studies show that a 10% increase in donor retention can increase donor lifetime value by 200%. It's also cost-effective—retaining a donor is five times cheaper than acquiring a new one. Retention is a matter of sustainability.



The emotional case for retention

Donors give because they feel a connection. Losing a donor often signals a breakdown in that connection—whether from poor communication, lack of transparency, or not feeling valued. When donors see the tangible impact of their contributions, they're far more likely to stay engaged.



Beyond cost-effectiveness

Retention goes beyond financial and emotional benefits—it provides the stability nonprofits need to grow and adapt. High retention strengthens your nonprofit's ability to plan for the future, invest in new initiatives, and maintain trust with your community.

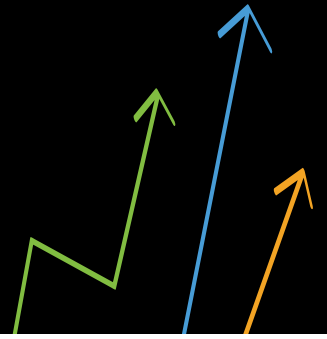


A practical perspective

Retention isn't just theoretical; it's actionable. The path to higher retention rates starts with understanding your donors' expectations and consistently meeting them. Organizations that focus on transparency, personalized communications, and clear impact reporting build stronger connections with their donors.

The question isn't whether retention matters—it's how you'll embed it into every aspect of your strategy. Let's explore what's possible when retention becomes your priority.

The retention landscape



According to the Fundraising Effectiveness Project (FEP), retention rates in the nonprofit sector remain a stubborn challenge—underscoring the need for better strategies to close these gaps.

Challenges facing nonprofits

- **Limited resources:** Staff shortages and tight budgets often force fundraisers to focus on short-term gains rather than retention strategies that yield long-term results. As one fundraiser shared, *“We need a designated person, yet we don’t have the money to hire someone.”*
- **Lack of data insights:** While **94% of nonprofits surveyed use CRMs, only 38% track first-time donor retention rates**, making it difficult to identify trends and tailor retention strategies. *“The database is only as good as the data input,”* a fundraiser observed.
- **Competing for attention:** Donors are bombarded with appeals from every direction—ads, emails, social media, and more. In this crowded landscape, nonprofits need tailored, engaging outreach.



Why donors walk away

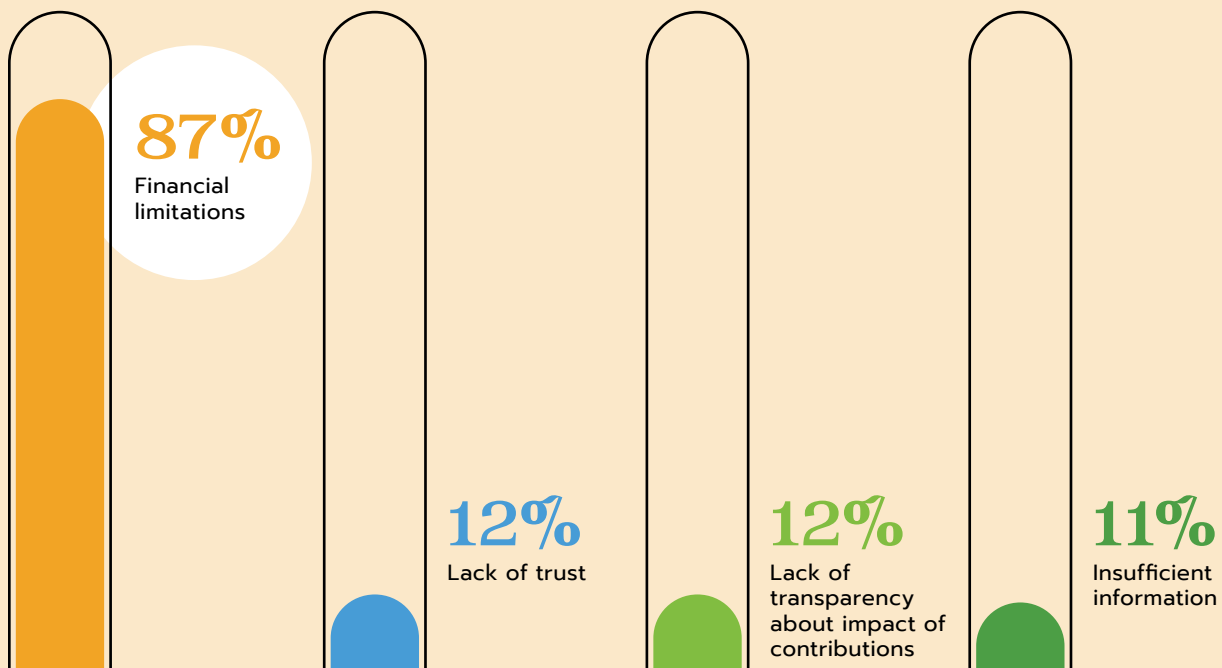
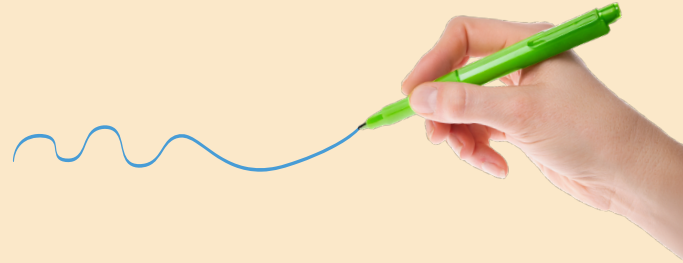
Donors often stop giving because they feel unappreciated, disconnected, or unsure of their impact.

- **Transparency matters: 24% of donors surveyed cited lack of transparency as a reason for stopping support.** As one donor put it, *“Keep communicating, even if it’s only a little at a time. I like to hear stories and updates.”*
- **Donor fatigue:** Repeated appeals without meaningful updates can leave donors feeling undervalued. **30% of fundraisers surveyed identified donor fatigue as a challenge.**
- **Financial challenges: 87% of donors stop or reduce support due to financial strain.** Offering flexible options like monthly gifts and volunteer opportunities helps retain engagement.

Why donors walk away

DONOR FINDINGS

What barriers, if any, prevent you from providing ongoing or regular financial support to a cause or nonprofit organization?



Donors often cite a **lack of transparency** as a reason for walking away, with **24%** naming it as a factor.

Yet, **only 36%** of nonprofits share regular impact reports—a missed opportunity to rebuild trust and keep supporters engaged.



Opportunities on the horizon

Retention may feel like an uphill battle, but it's also an opportunity for innovation. By embracing modern tools and rethinking communication strategies, nonprofits can turn challenges into growth opportunities.

- **Tech-powered insights:** Technology is reshaping the way nonprofits approach donor retention. According to our survey, **42% of organizations are very open to adopting new technologies**, including CRMs, predictive analytics, and automation tools. These solutions help proactively spot at-risk donors, segment audiences, and deliver personalized outreach. By bringing donor data into one system, giving platforms make it easier to track giving patterns and re-engage supporters with personalized, timely outreach.
- **Rethinking communication:** Younger donors increasingly prefer text messaging for its immediacy and personal touch, while nonprofits still rely heavily on email. Expanding into text and other preferred channels can improve engagement.
- **Shifting the focus:** Focusing on retaining existing donors builds a loyal base of supporters who amplify your mission through word-of-mouth and peer-to-peer advocacy. These efforts extend your reach without the high costs of acquisition.

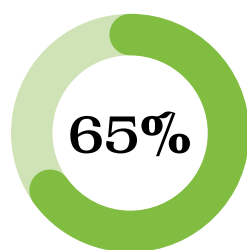
Retention may feel like an uphill battle, but it's also a space for innovation. Modern tools, combined with the personal touch, will enable you to build lasting relationships and inspire donors to take an active, ongoing role in supporting your mission.

The opportunity gap: Aligning donor expectations with nonprofit actions

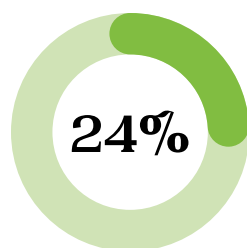


While many fundraisers stick to familiar approaches like email campaigns and event appeals, donors increasingly expect more—dynamic, personalized experiences that reflect their individual impact and offer modern conveniences like digital wallets and text updates. This gap between what donors want and what nonprofits deliver represents a significant opportunity to improve engagement and retention.

What donors want



Survey data reveals that **65% of donors value regular updates** about their impact. They want tangible results that show how their contributions further your mission.



Additionally, **24% of donors prefer using digital wallets**, citing the ease and convenience they provide. Younger donors prefer mobile-friendly tools and “bite-sized” updates, while older donors value detailed updates on how their gifts are making a difference.



One donor shared,

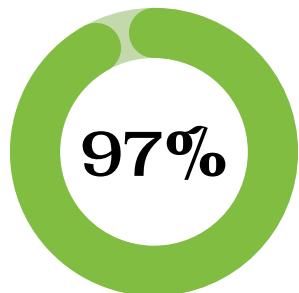
“I need to feel like my contribution matters—not just once but consistently.”

Another donor echoed this sentiment:

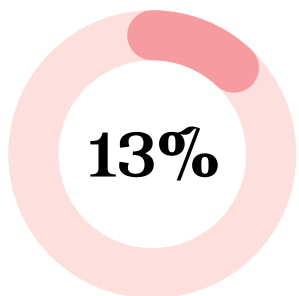
“Ease of payment is key! If I can pay via ApplePay and don’t need to go find my wallet, there’s a better chance I’ll send money.”



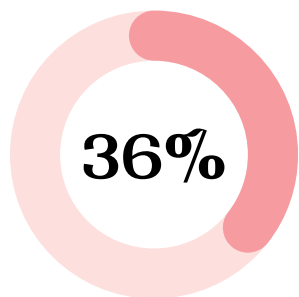
What nonprofits deliver



97% of fundraisers surveyed send personalized thank-you notes, building goodwill but not fully addressing the deeper need for ongoing engagement.



Only **13% of fundraisers in our survey use text messaging**—a channel that ranks as the third most preferred by donors. Over-reliance on email and traditional methods risks alienating supporters who expect faster, more dynamic communication.



Gaps in communication further erode trust, as only **36% of nonprofits in our survey share regular impact reports**.

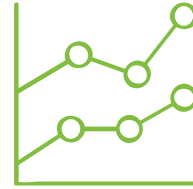
DONOR FINDINGS

How do you prefer to hear from the causes or nonprofit organizations you support?





As one fundraiser noted,
"We know what our donors want, but we don't have the tools or time to deliver it effectively."



Additionally, while **83% of fundraisers believe offering multiple payment options improves retention**, fewer than **3% actively prioritize digital wallets** as a primary giving method, and **only 47% offer them**.

Bridging the gap

Closing this gap means shifting your approach from transactional to relational. It's not just about what you say to donors—it's about how and when you say it. Transparency builds trust, but consistency and relevance keep donors engaged over time. Offering modern conveniences like digital wallets and personalized, multi-channel communication aligns with donor preferences and ensures

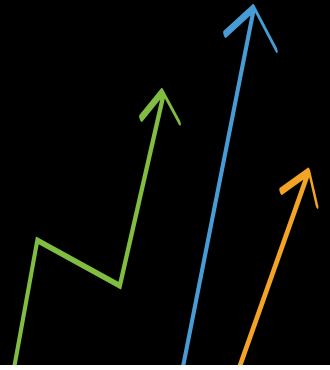
a seamless experience. Tools like predictive analytics and segmentation enable you to understand your donors as individuals, not just data points.

Equally important is providing real-time updates that showcase donor impact. By combining data-driven insights with storytelling, you can create experiences that make donors feel like active partners in your mission.

As one donor succinctly put it,
"When I see how my gift is making a difference, I feel more connected—and I want to keep giving."



Lessons from high-retention nonprofits



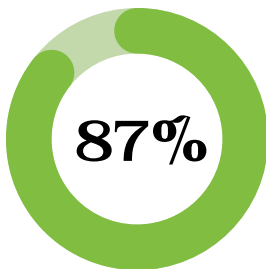
Nonprofits that excel in donor retention aren't just lucky—they're strategic. These organizations share three common practices:

- Personalization
- Technology
- Consistent communication

Personalization as a cornerstone

Why retention starts with connection:

Donors are 15% more likely to stay engaged when they receive personalized updates.



High-retention organizations prioritize personal connections. According to our survey, **87% of fundraisers cite personalized communication as the most effective retention strategy.**



Donors echoed this sentiment:

"Clear impact updates and personalized engagement help increase donor experience."



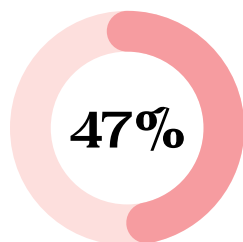
Segmentation makes personalization easier

50% of fundraisers surveyed segment donors based on giving history, interests, or demographics. This remains an untapped opportunity for many nonprofits.

Strategic use of technology



Retention leaders use CRMs and donor insights to craft tailored outreach. Our survey shows that while **94% of fundraisers use CRMs,**



only 47% take full advantage of these tools and user donor insights to tailor their outreach. The right giving platform can help nonprofits realize their full potential.



One fundraiser shared,

"We've been able to turn one-time givers into recurring donors simply by using data to tell the right story to the right person."

One fundraiser said,

"Segmenting donors based on their preferences will boost engagement and donor loyalty."



Transparency and recurring giving

Consistent updates about how donations make a difference build trust and inspire recurring giving. Survey data shows that **65% of donors feel most connected to a nonprofit when they receive regular updates.**

Recurring donors often feel a deeper connection to the mission, **with 63% stating they give multiple times throughout the year because the cause is important to them.**

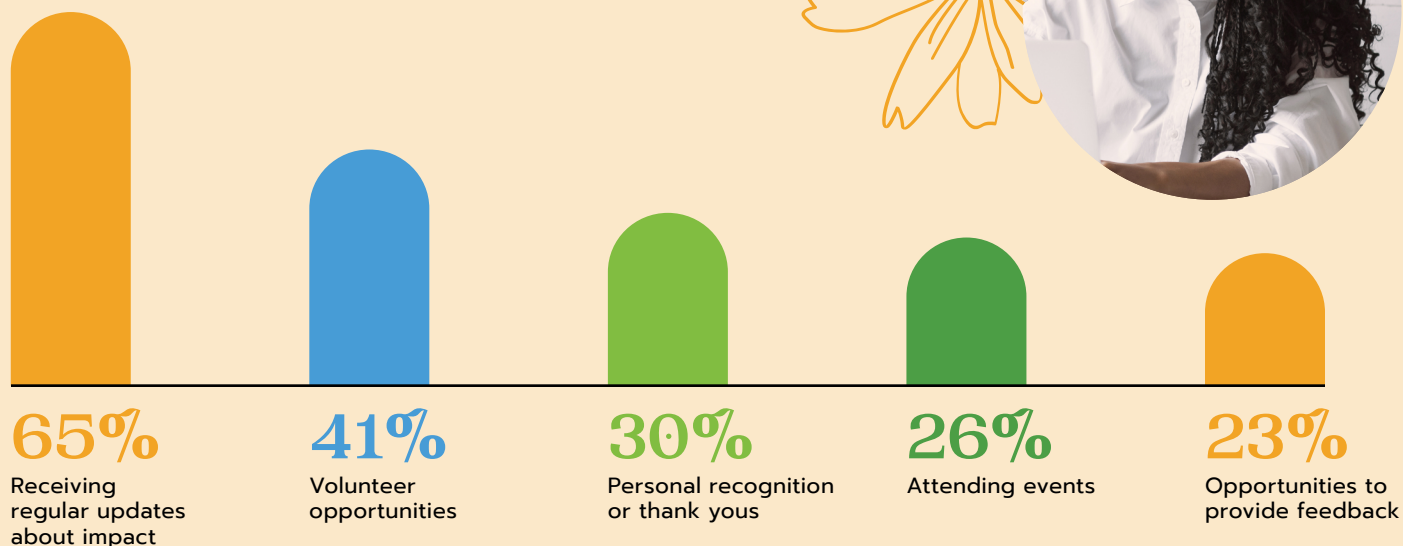


One donor shared,

"When I see the faces of people impacted, it reinforces my decision to stay engaged."

DONOR FINDINGS

What activities help you feel connected and committed to a nonprofit?

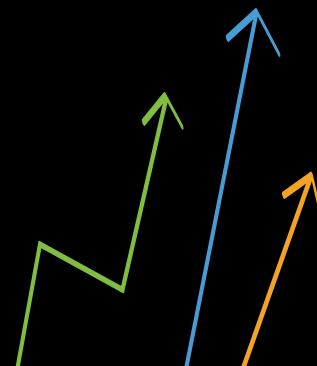


Key takeaway

Retention starts with connection. Align your outreach with donor values, use personalized updates, transparent communication, and segmentation to deepen relationships and set the stage for long-term growth.



Creating a donor-centered retention strategy



Putting donors at the heart of your retention strategy takes empathy, focus, and a solid plan. Using insights from donor data, you can foster loyalty, deepen connections, and build steady support for your mission.

Step 1: Centralize your constituent data

- Good data is the foundation of great retention. Consolidating your data into one system gives you a complete view of your donors, making it easier to track interactions, segment donors effectively, and personalize your outreach. Scattered data creates inefficiencies and missed opportunities.
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Invest in a giving platform that integrates donor data across systems, ensuring that every interaction, gift, and communication is easily accessible.
 - As one fundraiser shared, *“The database is only as good as the data input.”* Regularly update your system to keep donor information current and reliable.

Step 2: Clean and maintain your donor data

- Data hygiene is a journey, not a destination—it requires ongoing effort to keep your outreach relevant and effective. **Inadequate data remains a major hurdle for 30% of fundraisers.** Duplicate records, outdated contact details, and incomplete donor profiles hinder your ability to engage meaningfully. As one fundraiser put it, *“The database is only as good as the data input.”*

• Turn this strategy into action:

- Schedule quarterly database cleanups and invest in tools or training for data management.
- One fundraiser shared, *“Our CRM has been used as a dumping ground; it’s time to treat it like the asset it is.”*

Step 3: Segment your donors and personalize outreach

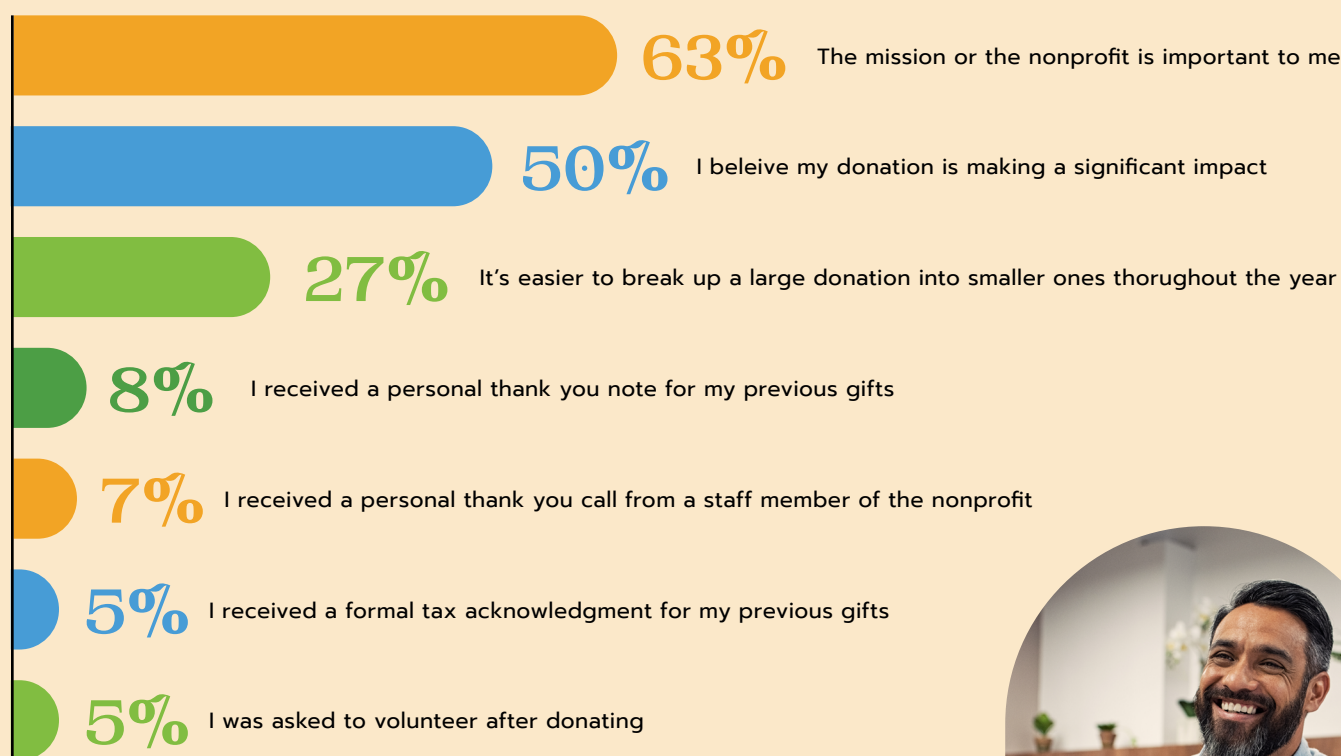
- Organize your donors by giving history, interests, or demographics to create messages that resonate with their motivations.
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Create at least three donor segments (for example, first-time donors, recurring donors, and lapsed donors) and craft unique communication plans for each.
 - As one nonprofit shared, *“We can send slightly different messages depending on where someone is in their journey, and it’s working—donors feel more connected than ever.”*

Step 4: Promote recurring giving programs

- Recurring giving provides a steady revenue stream and encourages long-term commitment. Survey data shows that **63% of recurring donors** feel like they're part of an important cause.
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Make recurring giving the default option on donation forms.
 - Highlight how monthly gifts support sustained impact. *"Communicating the importance of recurring giving allows donors to have an impact at a financial pace that works for them,"* noted one fundraiser.

DONOR FINDINGS

Why did you give more than once to a single organization?



Step 5: Share consistent and compelling impact updates

- Regular updates build trust and keep donors engaged. **65% of donors surveyed say clear results strengthen their connection to a nonprofit.**
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Bring your updates to life with visual storytelling—photos, videos, and infographics can make your message more engaging.
 - One donor shared, *“Seeing the faces of those I’ve helped makes me want to continue giving.”*



Step 6: Gather and act on donor feedback

- Feedback strengthens relationships and offers valuable insights. Despite its importance, only **14% of nonprofits in our survey use donor surveys**, leaving a wealth of insights untapped.
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Use surveys or one-on-one conversations to gather feedback.
 - Show donors you’re listening by incorporating their insights into your strategy. [Donors who feel heard are more likely to stay engaged.](#)

Here are a few resources to help you put together a donor survey

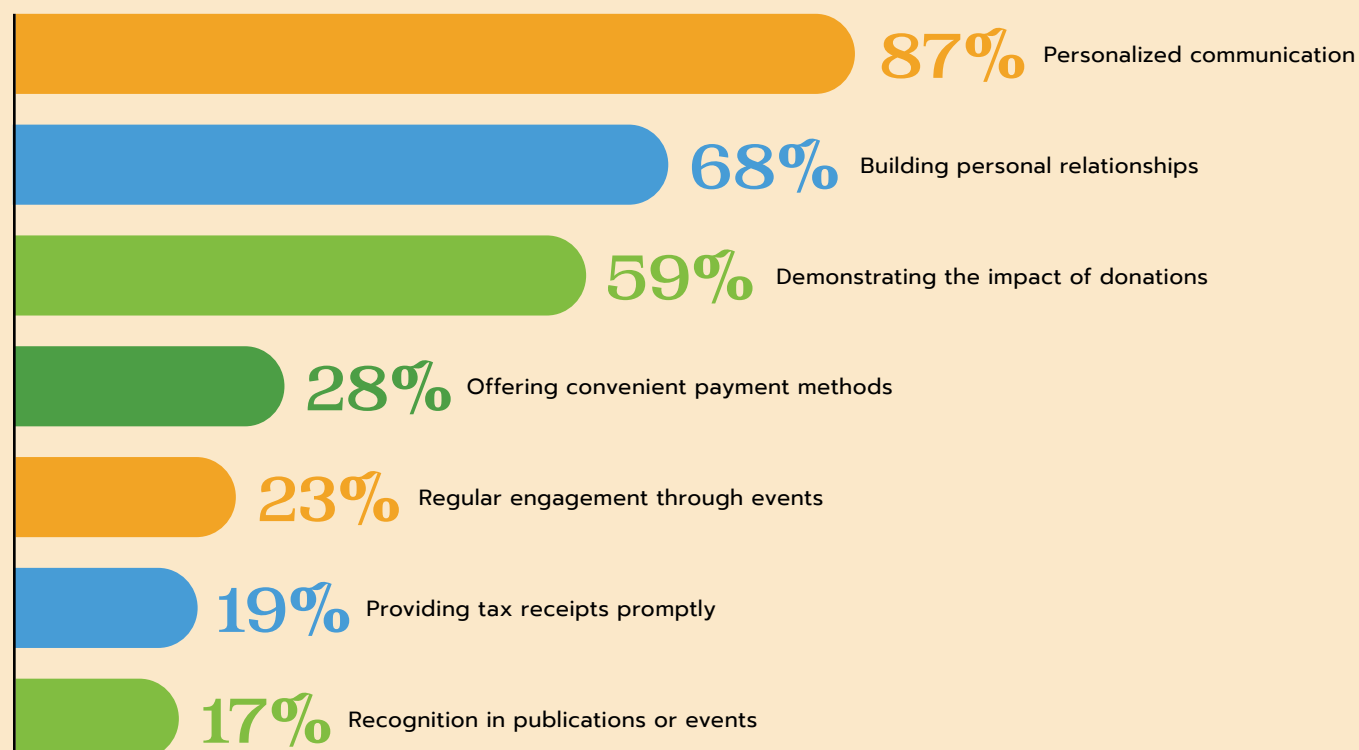
- [3 Examples of Nonprofit Donor Surveys](#)
See how other organizations use surveys to strengthen relationships and gather meaningful insights.
- [What Are The Best Questions To Ask In A Donor Survey?](#)
Get expert guidance on formulating questions that elicit valuable responses tailored to your mission.
- [A Guide to the Hidden Power of Donor Surveys](#)
Explore the benefits of donor surveys and best practices for designing and implementing them effectively.

Step 7: Show your donors some love

- Celebrate milestones and tell your loyal supporters how much they mean to you. Personal gestures like a thoughtful note or public shoutout go a long way in building stronger connections.
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Highlight donor milestones in newsletters, social media, or events.
 - Personalize thank-you messages. Survey data shows that while only 30% of donors expect personalized thank-you messages, **87% of fundraisers report personalized communication as a top retention strategy.**

FUNDRAISER FINDINGS

Which strategies have you found to be most effective in retaining donors?



Step 8: Prioritize thank-you calls

- Thanking donors with a personal call isn't just a good idea—it works. **Donors are 39% more likely to give again** when thanked within **24–48 hours**.
- **Turn this strategy into action:**
 - Set aside time each month for staff or board members to call donors.
 - Focus first on recent donors to reinforce their support and encourage repeat giving.



Retention in action

The Mara Elephant Project shows how recurring giving and automation can transform donor retention. By focusing on monthly donations and using consistent, automated updates about how contributions protected elephant habitats, they **increased donor retention by 30%**.

Key takeaway

An effective donor-centered retention strategy starts with clean data and ends with meaningful communication. Centralizing data, personalizing outreach, and celebrating donor contributions, can turn retention into a strategic advantage that sustains your mission.

Thank you! ❤️



The evolving role of technology in personalized retention

Technology is reshaping how nonprofits connect with donors, making it easier to build lasting relationships. Nonprofits using digital tools for retention tend to focus on four key areas:

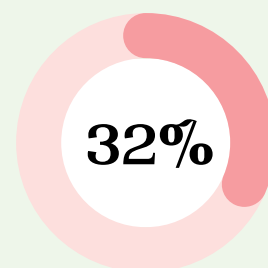
- Data-driven insights
- Automation
- Seamless giving
- Personalization at scale

Predictive analytics: Anticipating donor behaviors

Predictive analytics helps identify at-risk donors and re-engage them before it's too late. By analyzing giving patterns and engagement trends, these tools reveal early signs of disengagement.

Survey insight

32% of fundraisers do not use additional giving platform tools like AI, machine learning, or advanced analytics for donor engagement, leaving significant potential untapped. These tools make it easier to spot donors who would benefit from personalized updates, strengthening their connection to your mission.



Turn this strategy into action:

- Use your giving platform or CRM's predictive tools to identify trends and create re-engagement plans.
- Focus on gratitude milestones, personalized updates, and proactive updates to keep donors connected.



As one high-retention fundraiser noted,

"Predictive analytics help us focus our limited resources on the donors who are most likely to lapse, but also those with the capacity to deepen their support."

Automation: Scaling meaningful communication

Automation ensures every donor feels seen and valued by delivering personalized thank-you emails, impact updates, and reminders at scale—all while reducing staff workload.

Retention results

Nonprofits using automation, like The Mara Elephant Project, report up to 15% higher retention rates. Automating routine tasks frees them to spend more time building relationships.



Turn this strategy into action:

- Automate workflows for donor acknowledgments, receipts, impact updates, and milestone celebrations.
- Use segmented lists to tailor automated messages based on donor behavior.



One fundraiser shared,

“Automation has been a game-changer—we can stay connected with our donors consistently and meaningfully.”

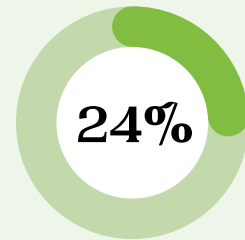


Digital wallets and mobile giving: Meeting donors where they are

Digital wallets and mobile giving simplify the giving process and reduce friction for supporters.

Survey results

While **24% of donors prefer digital wallets**, making them the third most popular donation method, **less than 3% of fundraisers** believe PayPal, Venmo, Cash App, and similar digital wallets are the preferred payment method for their donors.



Fundraisers who prioritize mobile-friendly platforms often see **34% higher engagement**.



One donor shared,

"Ease of payment is key! If I can pay via ApplePay and don't need to go find my wallet, there's a better chance I will send money."

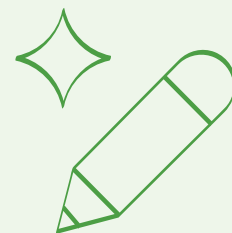
Turn this strategy into action:

- Optimize donation forms for mobile use and highlight digital wallets like Apple Pay and Google Pay as convenient options during checkout.
- Test forms for ease of use and track completion rates to measure the effectiveness of these updates.



"We've seen an uptick in smaller, recurring gifts simply because it's easier for donors to complete a donation on their phones," reported one fundraiser.





AI Writing Assistants: Personalization at your fingertips

AI tools make it easier to deliver personalized communication at scale. [AI tools can reduce content creation time by 90%](#), so you can deliver communication faster without sacrificing quality.

But technology alone isn't enough. The most effective nonprofits use AI as a tool to enhance—not replace—the human connection. Personalized outreach resonates best when paired with authentic empathy and donor-specific insights.



One fundraiser noted,

"AI helps us craft content that speaks directly to donor's interests, making outreach feel more relevant."

Turn this strategy into action:

- [Use AI](#) to draft tailored thank-you notes and donor milestones, then refine the content to match your organization's voice and values.
- Generate AI insights with personal knowledge of donors to draft messages that feel genuine and heartfelt.



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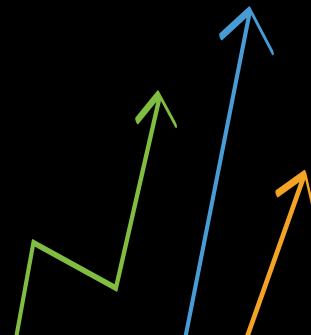
Retention in action

[Boys & Girls Clubs of Indianapolis](#) demonstrates how technology can drive retention. By implementing automated workflows and leveraging segmentation, they re-engaged **60% of lapsed major donors** and increased their average gift size by **20%**. Their strategic use of donor insights and automation highlights how technology can make retention efforts more scalable and effective.

Key takeaway

Technology is more than streamlining tasks—it's about changing the way nonprofits and donors connect. It helps you see what drives your supporters, what they care about, and how they want to be part of your mission. **When paired with empathy, tools like AI and automation become less about efficiency and more about creating moments that matter.**

Rethinking retention



Retention isn't just about keeping donors—it's about inspiring them to become active participants in your mission. You now have an opportunity to reimagine retention as a dynamic, ongoing partnership—**by blending thoughtful technology with authentic connection—showing donors they're not just part of a transaction but part of a shared vision for change.**

Retention as a shared mission

Survey findings show that **63% of the donors who provide ongoing support do so because they feel part of an important cause.** Nonprofits can amplify this connection by emphasizing donors' roles as active partners in their mission. Tools like predictive analytics and impact reporting help celebrate milestones or showcase cumulative donor impact. For example, an annual "impact recap" email can show donors how their support directly contributes to your goals.

Proactive engagement through innovation

Modern tools like conversational AI and predictive analytics enable nonprofits to anticipate donor needs and deliver timely, relevant outreach. These tools make it easier to tailor engagement strategies that resonate with individual donors.

Future-proofing your strategy

Retention strategies can't just follow trends—they need to set them. Donors expect more than ever: giving should be simple, their role should feel meaningful, and they want to know their impact. Tools like AI and predictive analytics are great, but the tech isn't the point. The real power lies in showing donors they're a vital part of your mission. Build their trust, and they'll stick around—not just for the cause, but for the connection.



The last word: Redefining donor retention for the future



The best retention strategies go beyond numbers—they cultivate relationships that stand the test of time. **The nonprofits that excel at retention move beyond transactional giving to deliver personal, meaningful experiences that resonate with supporters.** It's more than sending thank-you notes or updating donors on outcomes—it's about showing them they're part of something bigger.

Throughout this guide, we've explored strategies that nonprofits are using to engage donors and build loyalty: from data centralization and automation to storytelling and transparency. Yet at the heart of retention lies something timeless—the need for connection. When donors feel valued, informed, and aligned with your mission, they become not just contributors but champions of your cause.

The future of retention combines the best of both worlds: cutting-edge technology that personalizes outreach and authentic human connection that inspires loyalty and advocacy.

Retention isn't a static goal—it's a journey.

By investing in relationships, you're not just securing funding—you're cultivating a loyal community that will sustain your mission for years to come.

The all-in-one giving platform

Donor Management
Volunteer Management
Online Fundraising
Event Management
Peer-to-Peer Fundraising
Auction Fundraising
Payment Processing
Email Marketing
Reporting & Analytics
Integration Hub



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