



DONOR EXPERIENCE REPORT

National Alliance on Mental Illness

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Introduction

Excellent customer experiences are profoundly meaningful. If there's anything Americans are not ambivalent about it is fantastic customer experiences. We expect it each and every time we interact with a brand.

You might be surprised to learn that satisfying customer experiences are rated as being more important than price and product.

Consistently creating a top-notch giving experience for donors is no different.

Why? Donors have the same expectations interacting with a nonprofit as with a for-profit.

They expect prompt, personalized communications that show genuine appreciation. Equally as important, they expect to be told how their gift made an impact.

But what about the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)?

On top of delivering exceptional client experiences, every affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness must deliver a great donor experience.

This Donor Experience Report explores how NAMIs across the country communicate with donors in the most critical time in their relationship—the first 30 days after a new donor makes a gift.





What we researched and why



In this study, we donated \$25 to 50 NAMIs across the US. Our goal? Examine the giving process and donor communications to help them improve the donor experience. This detailed analysis covers two primary areas: the online donation process and the 30-day new donor journey immediately following the gift.

In this report, we aim to help you understand how your giving experience stacks up to your peers and understand how factors like proper gift acknowledgment and follow-up communications influence donor behavior and repeat gifts.

We reviewed the following areas:

- Was the donor given the opportunity to cover transaction fees?
- Were the transaction fees included without a choice?
- Were multiple payment types offered (Google Pay/Apple Pay/Venmo)?
- Was there an option to pay towards a designated fund?
- Was there an option to give as a tribute or memorial?
- Was there an option to join a newsletter or other email communication?
- Did the donor receive a receipt for their donation via email?
- Did the donor receive a personalized or customized donation receipt?
- Did the donor receive a thank you letter in the first 5, 15, and 30 days after their donation?
- Did the donor receive a thank you call after their donation?
- Did the donor receive a personalized thank you email?
- Did the donor receive a newsletter in the first 30 days?
- Did the donor receive an ask to become a recurring donor?



What did the data show?

Online giving experience

- 16%** Only 16% of NAMIs in this study offered multiple payment options for donors.
- 78%** of NAMIs invited donors to cover transaction fees associated with their gifts.
- 46%** of NAMIs preselected the option that donors cover the transaction fees for their gift.



How can NAMIs improve the donor's online giving experience?

The biggest miss for most NAMIs—84%—was limiting the online giving experience to credit cards only. Not giving donors the option to use their digital wallet and give via PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, or GooglePay is leaving money on the table.

Why is that such a game-changer?

COVID rapidly accelerated digital adoption. In 2019, just 41% of customer interactions were digital, and 7 months later, in July 2020, a whopping 65% were digital. (Source: RDK Group)

Think about your own digital habits for a second. Imagine going to the grocery store, walking through the aisles, picking out all your items, standing in a long line to check out,

and then suddenly realizing you don't have your credit card with you. How frustrating would it feel to have to drive all the way back home to retrieve your credit card?

If the store didn't take Apple Pay, you'd have no choice but to trek back home to retrieve your wallet while your ice cream melted at the checkout.

Studies show that making digital payment options available reduces donor checkout friction, builds trust, and increases unplanned gifts by 32% and repeat donations by 79%.

Yes, you really can increase your donation conversions by 32% just by adding digital wallet options like PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, and GooglePay to your donation form!

Is your call to action for giving clear and prominent on your homepage?

Clearly, offering digital payment options is a must. However, without a brightly colored donate button or popup box, website visitors might not notice where they go to donate.



In the example below, you can see a stellar example of a bright donate button in a contrasting color that really stands out. Plus, there's a clear call to action right above the fold—meaning it's visible to visitors without any need to scroll:





In contrast, the homepage below has a 'Donate' link that's the same color and size as all the other navigation links, making it easy to overlook. Instead of a clear call to action, the prime real estate above the fold is taken up by a large photo of a forest—with no compelling message to draw people in.

[Calendar](#) [Contact](#) [Donate](#) [Join](#) [Resources](#) [Volunteer](#)

Improving Lives for People Living with Mental Illnesses



Gift designations

70% of NAMIs offered donors the option to make a memorial or tribute donation.

18% of NAMIs gave donors the option to contribute to a specific fund.

How can we improve?

Affiliates of the National Alliance on Mental Illness are an attractive choice for anyone wanting to give a memorial or honorary gift. Not offering donors the chance to make a gift in tribute or as a memorial to another person is a missed opportunity, especially considering how many communities, children, families, and seniors' lives are touched by mental illness.

For NAMIs seeking to add memorial or honorary giving, you need to seamlessly capture the recipient's information so you can (a) properly notify honorees and (b) properly thank bereaved donors giving in memory. NAMI Northern Kentucky does a great job of this, as seen in the screenshot to the right:

The screenshot shows a donation form with the following fields and options:

- Total Donation Amount ***: Price: \$0.00
- Tribute Donation**: Radio buttons for In Memory of, In Honor Of, and Neither.
- Tribute Donation In Honor of or in Memory of Name**: Two input fields for **First** and **Last** names.
- Send Tribute Notification to Name**: Two input fields for **First** and **Last** names.
- Send Tribute Notification to Address**: A series of input fields for **Street Address**, **Address Line 2**, **City**, **State** (dropdown menu), and **ZIP Code**.
- Buttons**: "Donate Now" button.

Placeholder text for the name and address fields reads: "Please enter the name of the person on whose behalf you are making this donation." and "Enter the name of the person, e.g. family member, who should be notified about your donation." and "Enter the address of the person, e.g. family member, who should be notified about your donation."

Should we offer gift designation options?

Every NAMI should offer gift designations in memory or tribute, but it's perfectly acceptable to not have a list of designated fund options.

Giving donors multiple options to designate a gift can lead to decision fatigue. Too many choices, especially ones donors aren't familiar with, can overwhelm them and make them abandon the gift process.

As long as your donation form makes a clear and compelling case for support, there's no need to complicate things with multiple fund designations. Keep it simple and focused.

Saying thanks

96% of NAMIs sent a thank you email receipt.

46% personalized their email receipt.

20% of NAMI affiliates followed up with a mailed thank you letter within the span of 30 days.

12% of NAMI affiliates personalized their email thank you.

2% of NAMI affiliates picked up the phone to thank their new first-time donors.



Kudos to all but the two NAMI affiliates that emailed donors a thank you receipt.

When it comes to personalizing the receipt and thanking donors, the affiliates in this study have their work cut out for them.

[Study after study on donor behavior](#) tells us that the communications content that most influences whether a donor gives again is knowing the results achieved by their gift.

While an immediate email gift acknowledgment is essential because it informs the donor that you received their gift, it's just the first step. It's not enough to simply thank a donor; you must report back to them to tell them how their gift made a meaningful impact.

Reporting back to the donor to tell them how their gift made a difference is the key to getting another gift from the donor. It's also a critical step to building trust and a relationship with a donor.

How does trust fit into this? In 2023, nonprofits saw the [largest trust decline](#) of any American institution.

It's easy to understand how not hearing back after making a gift, getting a canned, generic response, and no follow-up about the impact of your gift could make you lose trust in the charity and hesitate to give again.

This is especially true for first-time donors, [81% of whom will not make a second gift](#). Yet, if you can motivate a new first-time donor to give that second gift, [63% of them will continue to donate](#).

How can I motivate new donors to make a second gift?

The answer is simple, and it works for all donors: the greatest gift you can give your donor is the gift of feeling known by you.

Every NAMI affiliate should use a first name personalization tag in their email thank you autoresponder.

Even better? If they're a new donor, recognize them as such in your thank you letter, as seen in the example below,

"Dear Julia,

We're overjoyed to have received such a generous first-time gift from you, and we're thrilled to welcome you into our donor family."

As mentioned earlier, following up to share the impact of a donor's gift is essential for getting that second donation.

However, of the 50 NAMI affiliates in this survey, only 10 followed up to mail an actual thank you letter. Only one picked up the phone to thank their new donor.

Failing to personally thank a new donor via mail or a phone call has a significant impact on revenue.

Studies show that personally thanking a first-time donor within 48 hours—whether with a card, call, or an emotionally effusive email—makes that first-time donor [300%](#) more likely to make a second gift.

This is a huge missed opportunity among the NAMIs in this study.

Adding to this lost revenue is a real expense since it costs [10 times more to acquire a new donor than to maintain an existing one](#).

If you can keep your donors loyal over time, their gifts increase, and they're more likely to name NAMI in their will or estate plans.



Recommended donor appreciation timeline



Here’s a philanthropic wake-up call: the first gift is just the start.

Donors who make a second gift are 60% more likely to give again. That’s why it’s critical to create an airtight ‘new donor honeymoon’ for the first 90 days. Show your appreciation and share how their gift made a difference with personal touches—before making another ask.

Below is a [timeline](#) to help, loaded with personal touches to show you care and opportunities to learn more about your new donor, from a quick donor survey to an invite for a tour.

New donor cultivation timeline (first 90 days)



Keep in mind—the invitation is the cultivation. Even if you invite a new donor for a tour and they don’t come, even if you have to leave a thank you voicemail when you call to say thanks—it still makes an impact.

How much of an impact? Picking up the phone to thank a new donor within 48 hours of their gift increased the odds of them giving again by **400%**.

Who doesn’t want donors who are four times as likely to give again?

Sadly, only one NAMI out of 50 made a thank-you phone call to their new donor. The great news? This is an easy fix!

Summary



This study revealed that most NAMIs aren't giving donors meaningful welcome, thank you, or follow-up communications that let donors feel the impact they're making.

The good news for any NAMI affiliate reading this report is that you can quickly implement a new donor cultivation timeline to change all that!

At the end of the day, the actions you take at your organization to deliver thoughtful, meaningful, prompt appreciation and cultivation will determine whether donors give more and stay loyal to your cause.



About the authors



Rachel Muir, CFRE

Rachel has worked every side of the Rubik’s cube that is the nonprofit sector. When she was 26 Rachel Muir launched Girlstart, a non-profit empowering girls in math, science, engineering and technology in the living room of her apartment with \$500 and a credit card. Several years later she had raised over 10 million and was featured on Oprah, CNN, and the Today show. Today Rachel delivers workshops and offers a monthly membership, [League of Extraordinary Fundraisers](#), transforming people into confident, successful fundraisers. Learn more about Rachel at www.rachelmuir.com.



James Goalder

With almost 20 years of experience working in nonprofit technology and sales and relationship management, James brings the perfect blend of experience for his role as Partnerships Manager at Bloomerang. In addition to his work experience, James volunteers with Project Grows, a community farm in Virginia, serving on the Board and on Volunteer Nights with the organization.

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