



DONOR EXPERIENCE REPORT

The Nonprofit Partnership - Erie, PA

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Introduction

Excellent customer experiences are profoundly meaningful. If there's anything Americans are not ambivalent about it's 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 more important than price and product.

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

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

They expect prompt, personalized communications that show genuine appreciation. Equally important, they expect you to tell them how their gift made an impact.

How well do nonprofits in Erie, PA treat new donors?

This Donor Experience Report explores how 50 nonprofit organizations in Erie, PA communicate with donors in the most critical time in their relationship—the first 30 days after a new donor makes a gift.

Will nonprofits in “Gem City” outperform their peers in other parts of the country delivering great giving experiences to new donors?



What we researched and why



In this study, we donated \$25 to 50 nonprofit organizations in Erie, PA. We examined the giving process and donor communications to help these nonprofits 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.

Our goal? To show how your giving experience stacks up against your peers and understand how actions 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

24%

of the nonprofits in this study invited donors to cover transaction fees associated with their gifts.

This is a missed opportunity. All charities should offer donors the option to pay the transaction fee if the donor wishes to do so. Studies show that over half of donors opt to cover the fee. Some platforms report this happening 65 - 92% of the time.

18%

of the nonprofits in this study offered multiple payment options for donors.

18%

of the nonprofits in this study preselected the option that donors cover the transaction fees for their gifts. As long as the donor can opt out, it's OK to have the option to cover the fees preselected. The best strategy to employ is to include a short rationale for how this helps you save on admin costs and increases the impact of their gift.

For example: "Make my gift go further by adding 3% to cover processing fees" or "If you opt to cover this small transaction fee, you'll be helping make an even bigger impact." To avoid any backlash, don't make it mandatory.

How can these nonprofits improve the donor's online giving experience?

The fastest way that the other 82% of the nonprofits in this study can amplify donation conversion rates is by embracing digital wallets.

Not giving donors the option to use their digital wallet and donate with PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, or Google Pay leaves money on the table. That's because more than 50% of Americans now embrace digital wallets over traditional payment methods.

Why are digital wallets such a game-changer for fundraising?

47%

of Americans spend more when using a digital wallet than traditional payment methods.

41%

of Americans would stop shopping with a merchant that didn't accept payments from digital wallets.



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

The 41 nonprofits in this study that accept only credit cards could increase their donation conversions by 32% just by adding digital wallet options like PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, and GooglePay to their donation forms.

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 suddenly realizing you don't have your credit card. 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.

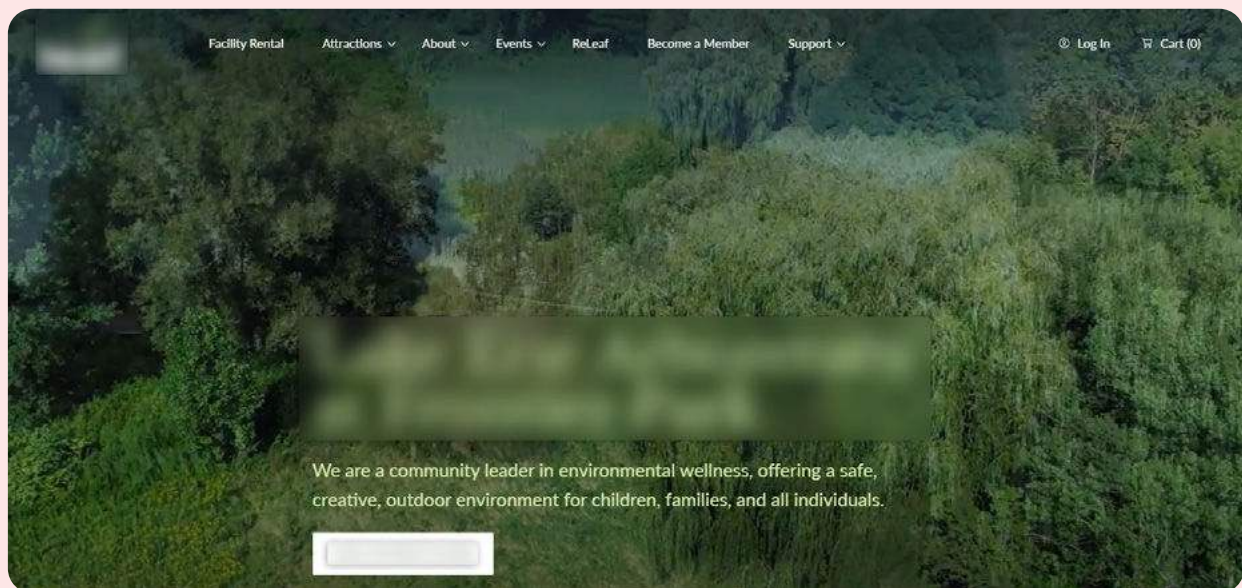
[Studies show](#) that making digital payment options available reduces donor checkout friction, builds trust, and [increases unplanned gifts by 32%](#) and repeat donations by 79%.

Is your call to action to give clear and prominent on your homepage?

Clearly, offering digital payment options is a must. But without a brightly colored donate button or popup box to give, website visitors might not notice it. Case in point, this homepage, as seen below:



- ✗ The “Support Us” button blends right in with the rest of the top navigation, making it easy to miss. In fact, the “Contact Us” button stands out more than “Support Us”! Your call to action should grab your visitor’s attention—not blend in with all the other news or offers on the page.



- ✗ Similarly, take a look at the home page in the screenshot above. Notice anything? That’s right—there’s no donate button in a contrasting color to make it pop.



In contrast, note how Erie Homes for Children and Adults features a brightly colored donate button that stands out on their homepage:



Gift designations

12% of organizations studied offered donors the option to make a memorial or tribute donation.

34% gave donors the option to contribute to a specific fund.

How can we improve?

It's disheartening that 76% of the organizations in this study don't offer donors the option to make a gift in tribute or as a memorial in honor of someone special. That's a missed opportunity, especially given the causes represented in this study—everything from animal care and pregnancy loss to prematurity, domestic violence, veterans, and conservation, just to name a few.

For any organization looking to add memorial or honorary giving, it's critical to seamlessly capture the recipient's information so you can properly notify honorees and thank bereaved donors who give in memory. Erie Humane Society does a fantastic job of this, as you can see in the screenshot on the right:

Donation Designation
Unrestricted - General Support

Donation Amount

Your Donation \$ Donation Total: \$0.00
\$25 minimum

Cover the processing fee; (Increases your donation by 3%)

Donation Details

* Name as it should appear in print such as an Annual Report

If you wish to be listed as anonymous, please type the word 'anon' in the above box.

▼ In Memory Donation

My gift is in memory of
 List memorial name here

Please notify
 List notification name here

Mailing Address

Zip City State
Input your zip code Input your zip code

Should we offer gift designation options?

Every organization should offer gift designations in memory or tribute, but not having a list of designated fund options is perfectly acceptable.

In this study, one organization offered 9 different options for a donor to designate a gift. Another had 13. The danger? Too many choices, especially ones the donor isn't familiar with, can overwhelm a donor 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

94% of the nonprofits in this study sent a thank you email receipt.

18% Only 18% personalized it.

18% Just 18% mailed a thank you letter within 30 days.



When it comes to personalizing the receipt and thanking donors, it looks like many of the nonprofits in this study still have some room to grow.

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

An immediate email gift acknowledgment is essential—it lets the donor know you received their gift. But that's just the beginning. You also need to report back and show them the meaningful impact their gift made.

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 critical for 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 nonprofit in this study 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 nonprofits in this survey, only nine followed up to mail an actual thank you letter. Only one picked up the phone to thank their new donor.

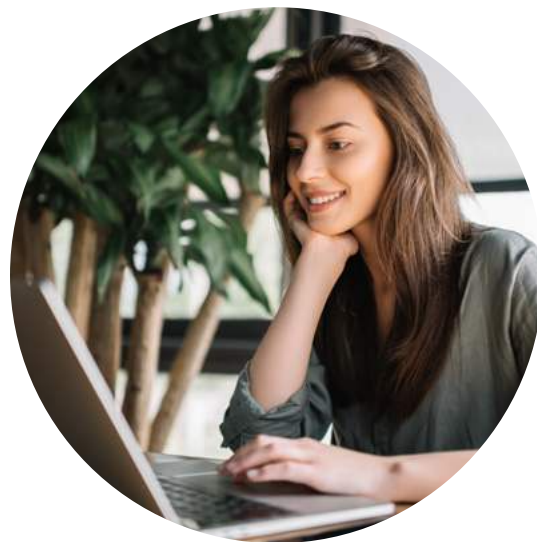
Failing to personally thank a new donor via mail or a phone call has a significant impact on revenue.

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 nonprofits 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 your organization 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, none of the nonprofits in this study made a thank-you phone call to their new donor. The great news? This is an easy fix!

Summary



This study revealed that most nonprofits in Erie, PA aren't giving donors meaningful welcome, thank you, and follow-up communications that let them feel the impact they are making.

The good news for any nonprofit 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.

Create a world inspired by giving



Tour Bloomerang

Donor Management
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Online Fundraising
Event Management
Peer-to-Peer Fundraising
Auction Fundraising
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Integration Hub



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