



2018 Nonprofit **LEADERSHIP IMPACT STUDY**

A LOOK AT THE CHALLENGES
NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP IS FACING
AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

BY NHU TE

NonProfitPRO
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 **MobileCause**

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At NonProfit PRO, we strive to bring you the latest and greatest information and resources to help you become a better leader in this thriving nonprofit space. There are so many challenges and opportunities facing nonprofit leadership today, so the team at NonProfit PRO worked hard to bring you this one-of-a-kind study on nonprofit leadership: “The 2018 Nonprofit Leadership Impact Study.”

Nonprofit organizations strive to do their part in creating a better world with their efforts and initiatives to reach their missions. But how do they get there? There is an abundance of information and resources out there to help nonprofit leadership teams reach their optimal potential, and it's important for nonprofits to understand that if they want to reach that potential, they have to stand out from the crowd.

With over 1.8 million nonprofits in the U.S., it's important now more than ever for nonprofits to build a strong foundation to ensure long-term success. And a strong nonprofit foundation is built on a strong leadership team that not only understands the fundamentals of effective fundraising, but also holds the invaluable skills and know-how of running a successful business.

In this study, we discovered in order for nonprofits to thrive, they need to create long-term goals and develop in-depth strategic plans to achieve them. And within those plans, nonprofits need to shift their focus on donor loyalty—retaining quality, committed donors versus having a high quantity of donors—because these committed donors will continue to give high-value gifts over a lifetime. Nonprofits also need to be more selective on who they put on their board of directors and make sure these individuals are best fit for the job. Furthermore, it's clear that many nonprofits are missing out on the opportunity to better their organization by not taking full advantage of what technology has to offer.

II. KEY FINDINGS

1. Nonprofits are not focused enough on donor loyalty.

- 8 percent of nonprofits see the donor retention rate as the most important outcome when measuring their organization's annual success.

2. Events are the most popular form of fundraising, but not necessarily the most effective form of fundraising.

- 85 percent of nonprofits have hosted a fundraising event.
- 33 percent of nonprofits said that events are the top revenue-producing fundraising strategy.

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3. In order to ensure an organization's success, nonprofits need to be more proactive about creating an annual, in-depth strategic plan.

- 74 percent of nonprofits do not have a in-depth strategic plan for their fundraising initiatives.

4. Nonprofits need to be more selective in who they choose to sit on their board of directors.

- 72 percent of nonprofits struggle with making sure that their board members are actively fundraising and/or keeping them motivated to do so.
- 53 percent struggle with finding quality board members who are passionate about the nonprofit's cause.
- 52 percent struggle with establishing clear roles and expectations for each board member.

5. Not enough nonprofits are taking full advantage of the benefits of technology.

- 80 percent of nonprofits are not utilizing mobile fundraising in their fundraising strategy.
- 63 percent of nonprofits estimate that their organization's digital fundraising falls under 20 percent of their overall fundraising.

III. INTRODUCTION

As the rest of the world evolves, so does the nonprofit world. There have been many changes in past few years—especially in 2017—that seem to challenge our sector and take our sector out of its traditional fundraising mindset. To flourish in this ever-changing market, leaders have to understand and adapt to the modern nonprofit business model.

Methodology

We sent out a survey about nonprofit leadership strategies to the NonProfit PRO audience in December 2017 to learn more about how nonprofit leadership teams are managing their day-to-day business operations. After a four-week time period, 479 respondents completed the survey.

Nonprofit leaders are pressed with internal challenges: How can we optimize our donations? How can we make the most impact with those donations? How can we keep our staff happy, motivated and passionate about our cause? How do we develop an effective board of directors? What technologies should we implement into our practice?

But they are also pressed with external challenges: Who are our donors? How do we connect and engage with our donors? What can we do to ensure their loyalty?

These are the answers we sought to answer.

We targeted nonprofit executives, so the majority of our survey respondents fell into the following categories (Figure 1a): development director or marketing/communications director (36 percent); executive director, chief operating officer or chief financial officer (27 percent); and president, vice president or CEO (23 percent). These executives were mainly responsible for raising funds and bringing in or retaining donors (Figure 1b).

FIGURE 1A:

Respondent's role at their organization.

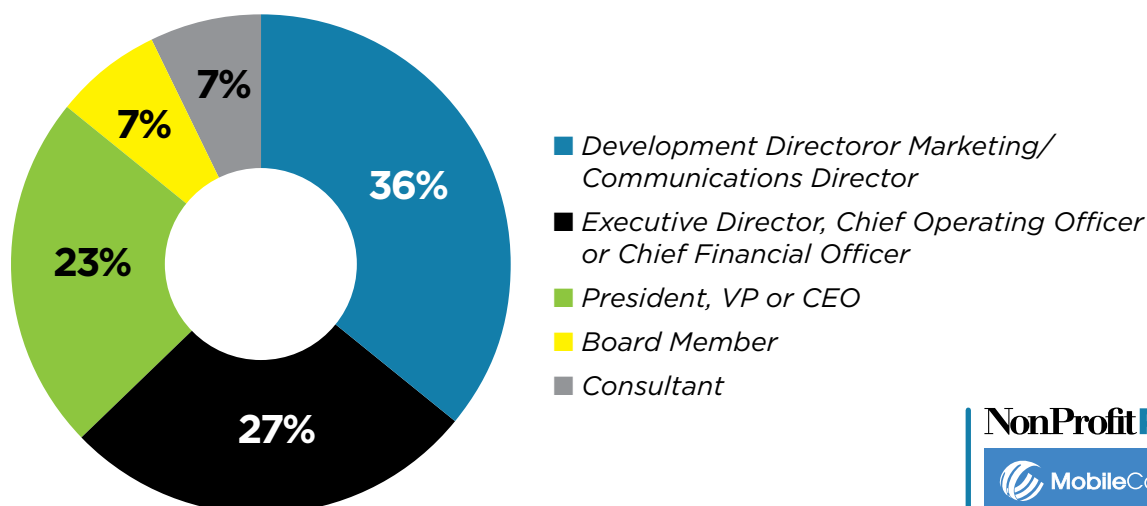
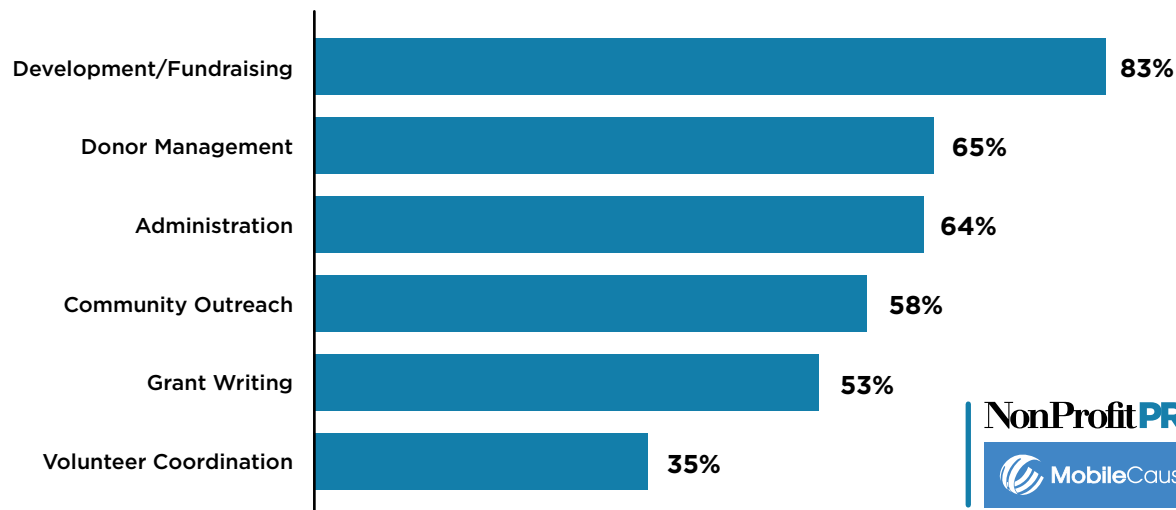


FIGURE 1B:

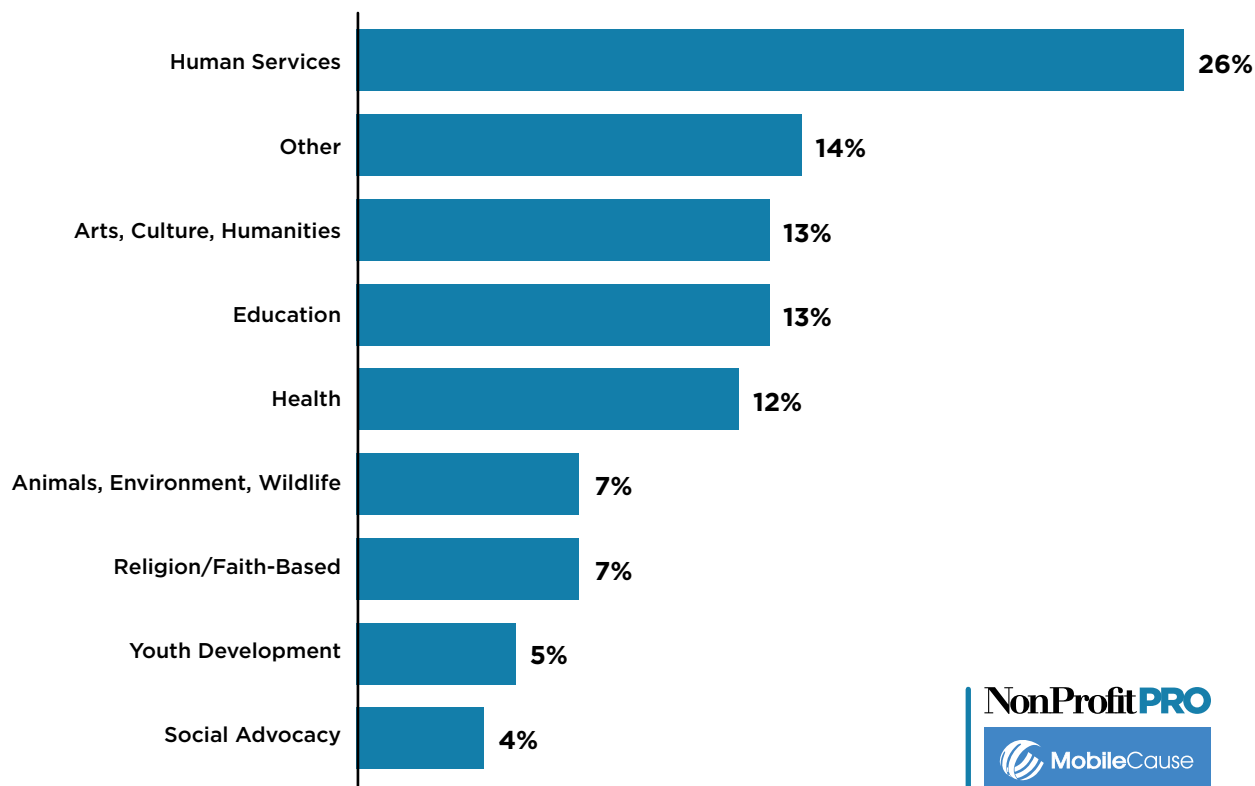
Respondents' responsibilities at their organization.



Additionally, our respondents came from all different types of nonprofit organizations, with the highest number of respondents (26 percent) coming from a human services-related nonprofit (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2:

A breakdown of respondents' nonprofit category.



VI. OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

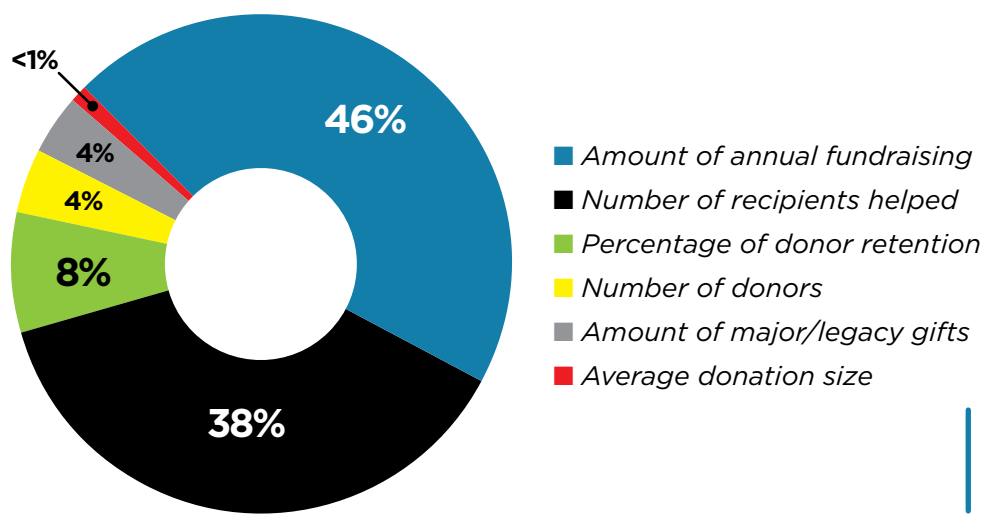
Being in charge of a nonprofit's day-to-day operations is no easy feat. Whether you are president, CEO, chief development officer or even a board member, being a part of a successful operation takes dedication, patience, perseverance, teamwork and—quite often in the nonprofit space—resilience. And ensuring the success of a nonprofit means more than raising money; it's about keeping donors happy by making sure they feel appreciated, ensuring your staff members remain motivated, inspired and fulfilled in their roles—all while raising money to put toward your nonprofit's mission and day-to-day expenses.

With all that said, here's an important question: How do you measure a nonprofit's success? Success can be a relative term; it depends on whom you are asking. To a donor, a nonprofit's success could be measured on what the organization is doing with donations (its impact). To a fundraiser, it could be measured by how much money is raised. To a nonprofit professional in a leadership role (e.g. executive director), it could be the organization's retention rate.

NonProfit PRO sought to understand how nonprofit leadership defines success. When we asked our survey respondents, the majority said “amount of annual fundraising” (46 percent) or “number of recipients helped” (38 percent). What’s interesting here is that only 8 percent said “amount of annual fundraising,” 4 percent said “number of donations” and fewer than 1 percent said “average donation size” (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3:

The most important outcome when measuring a nonprofit’s success.

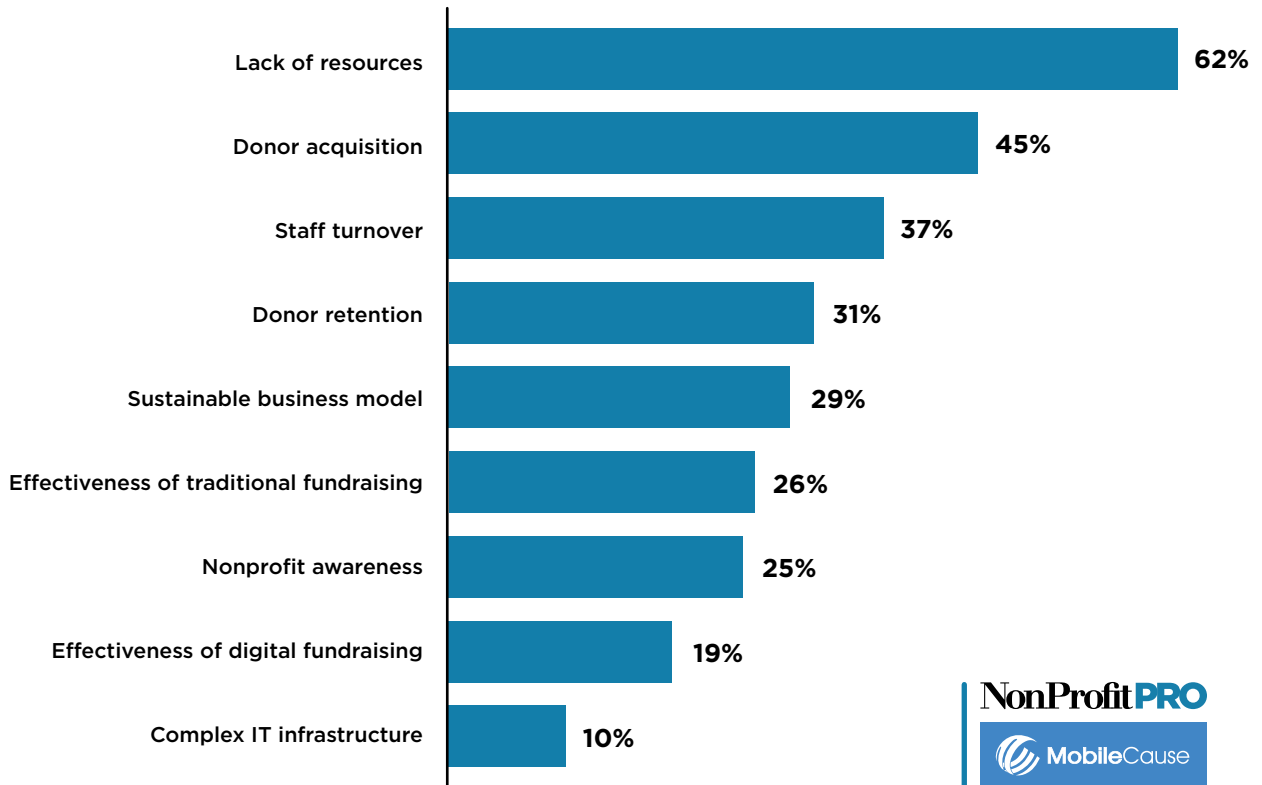


While all these options are important factors to consider, the top two answers were more focused on attracting more donors and not on obtaining quality, lifetime donors. Ensuring long-term nonprofit success should be heavily weighted on the quality of donors and donations, which is why nonprofits may be missing an opportunity for growth. If nonprofits drove their focus more on gaining and retaining quality donors—those who will donate more dollars and at a more frequent level over time—not only will the percentage of donor retention, number of donors, average donation size and amount of major/legacy gifts improve, the amount of annual fundraising and number of recipients helped would improve over time as well. And this will ensure a long-lasting relationship with each donor, which will, in turn, provide the nonprofit with sustainable, long-term success.

According to survey respondents, the top three challenges facing leadership today are 1) lack of resources, 2) donor acquisition and 3) staff turnover (Figure 4). What’s interesting here is how the top three challenges can create a cascade effect. Nearly 62 percent of respondents said the top challenge facing leadership teams in our sector is having a lack of resources. And a lack of resources can translate into a lack of funds to keep business operations running (e.g. not providing staff members enough financial stability), which leads to staff turnover. In turn, staff turnover is the reason why nonprofits are struggling with the challenge of acquiring more donors, because fewer staff members means less efforts are being put forth to bring in more donors.

FIGURE 4:

Challenges facing nonprofit leadership teams.

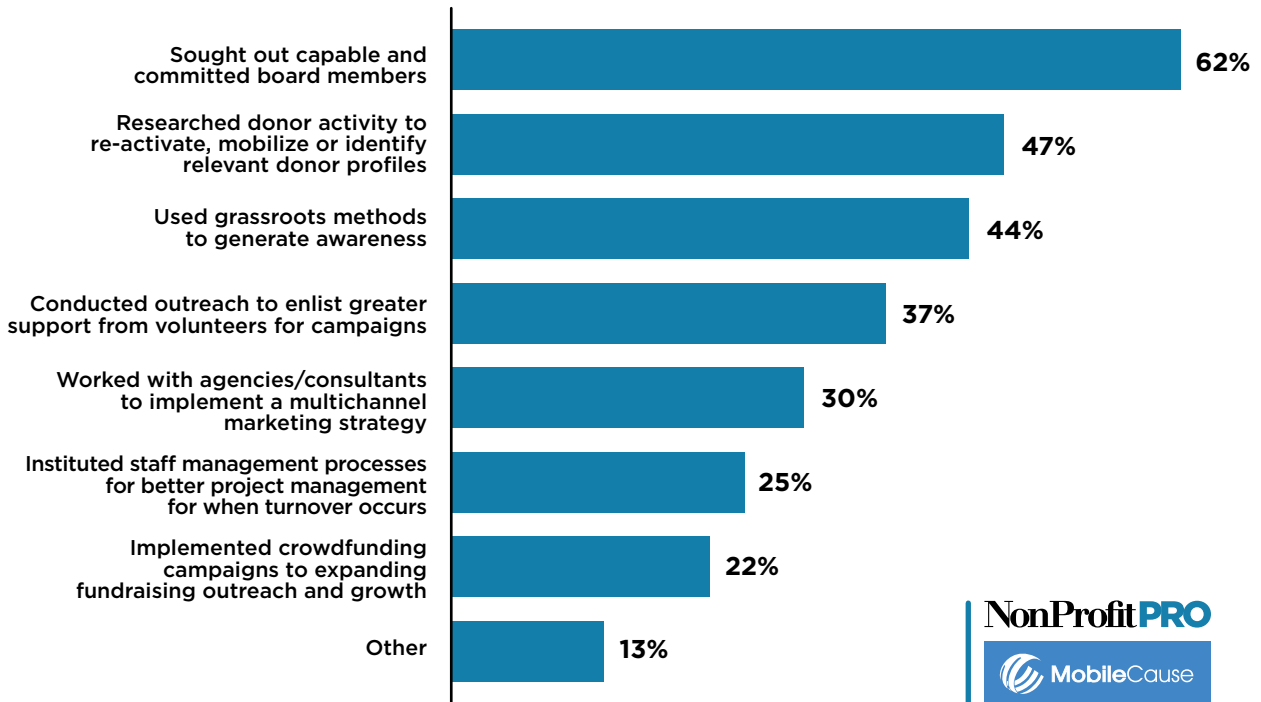


To address these challenges, 62 percent of respondents said they sought out capable and committed board members; 47 percent researched donor activity to re-activate, mobilize or identify relevant donor profiles; 44 percent used grassroots methods to generate awareness and 37 percent conducted outreach to enlist greater support from volunteers for campaigns (Figure 4). The majority of nonprofits are reaching out to find quality board members who can provide fresh perspectives to help them solve the challenges that their organization is faced with and are analyzing donor activity data in an attempt to improve the way they are engaging with their donors.

Earlier we identified one of the biggest challenges that leadership teams face is staff turnover. However, only 25 percent of respondents said that they instituted staff management processes for better project management for when turnover occurs (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5:

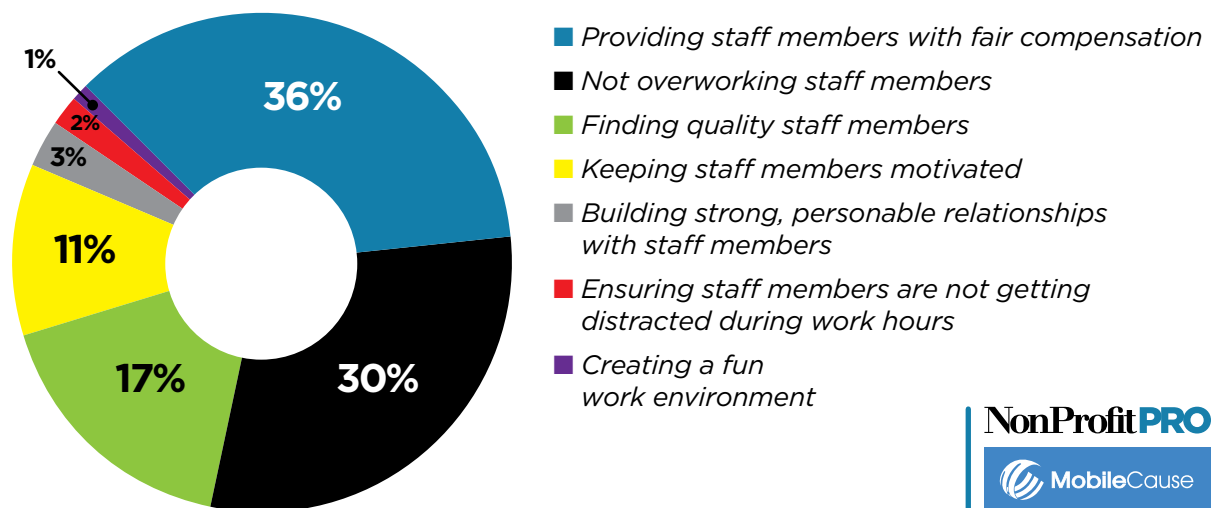
Strategies nonprofits used to address challenges.



When it comes to nonprofit staff, there are two main challenges that we hypothesized: finances and work/life balance. Our prediction was reinforced by the survey results. Nearly 36 percent of respondents said that the No. 1 challenge that their nonprofit faces in terms of staff management is providing staff members with fair compensation and 30 percent said not overworking staff members (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6:

Challenges of nonprofit staff management.



At NonProfit PRO, we always talk about the importance of being transparent with your donors—letting them know where their donations are going and what kind of impact it's making on the world. But transparency is also important within your organization, with your staff members. To ensure that staff members are being fairly compensated, are not overworked, continue to stay motivated and truly love what they do, have an open form of communication with them. Like with your donors, build strong and healthy relationships with your staff members as well. By doing so, you will keep them happy, they will be able to be honest with you about how they feel and it will create a thriving work environment, lessening the high rate of staff turnover.

While the biggest challenges nonprofits face are internal, nonprofits seem to be driving their focus on external efforts (research donor activity and generate awareness). We believe that nonprofits are missing the big picture and are missing out on a great opportunity to address the challenges. If nonprofits put more energy into strengthening their internal infrastructure by drawing up a strategic plan that details how they can optimize their resources, it would address other challenges—donor acquisition, donor retention, fundraising effectiveness—and would create a long-term, sustainable business model.

Almost 50 percent of respondents estimated that out of their entire donor base, under 20 percent are newly acquired each year (Figure 7a). A very small amount (13 percent) said that newly acquired donors reached over 30 percent. We expected the number of newly acquired donors to be higher, because of the continuous outreach to bring in new donors (e.g. #GivingTuesday). When it comes to donor retention, 34 percent estimated 51 to 75 percent of their donors are retained each year. Twenty-two percent said that about 76 to 100 percent of their donors are retained each year (Figure 7b), which is a surprising, but gratifying fact. It means that these organizations are doing something right in attempts to retain their donors.

FIGURE 7A:
Year-to-year acquisition rate.

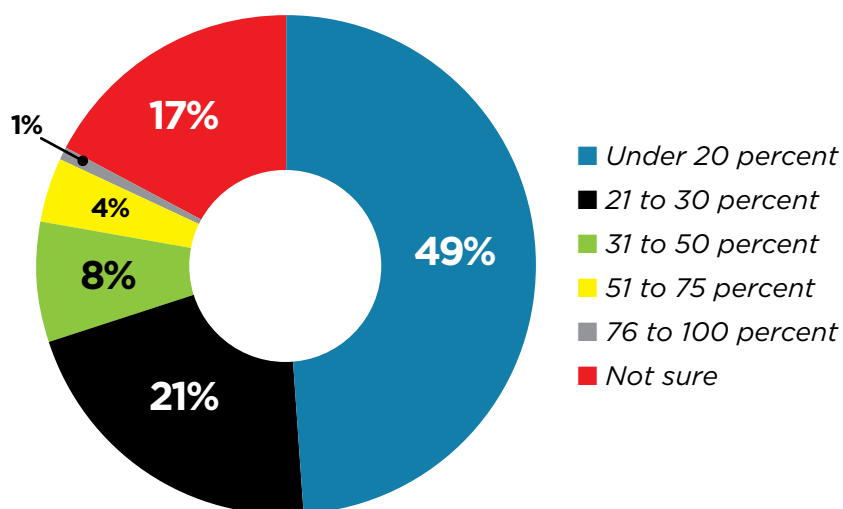
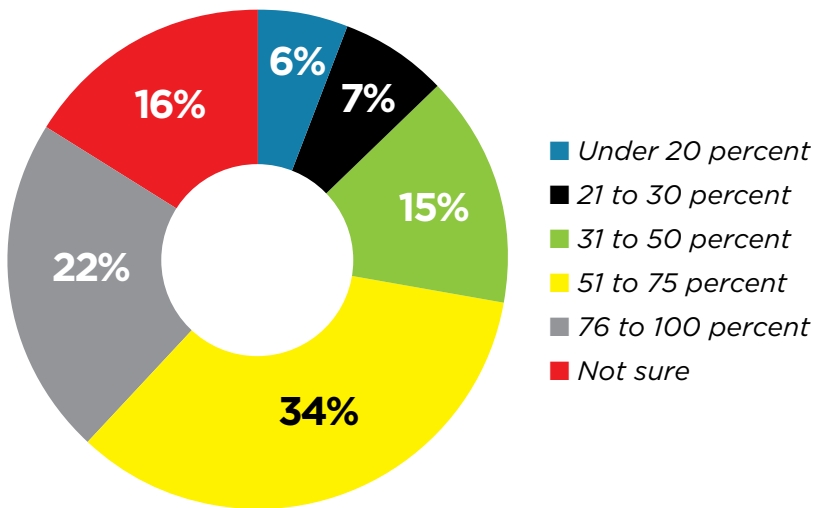


FIGURE 7B:
Year-to-year retention rate.

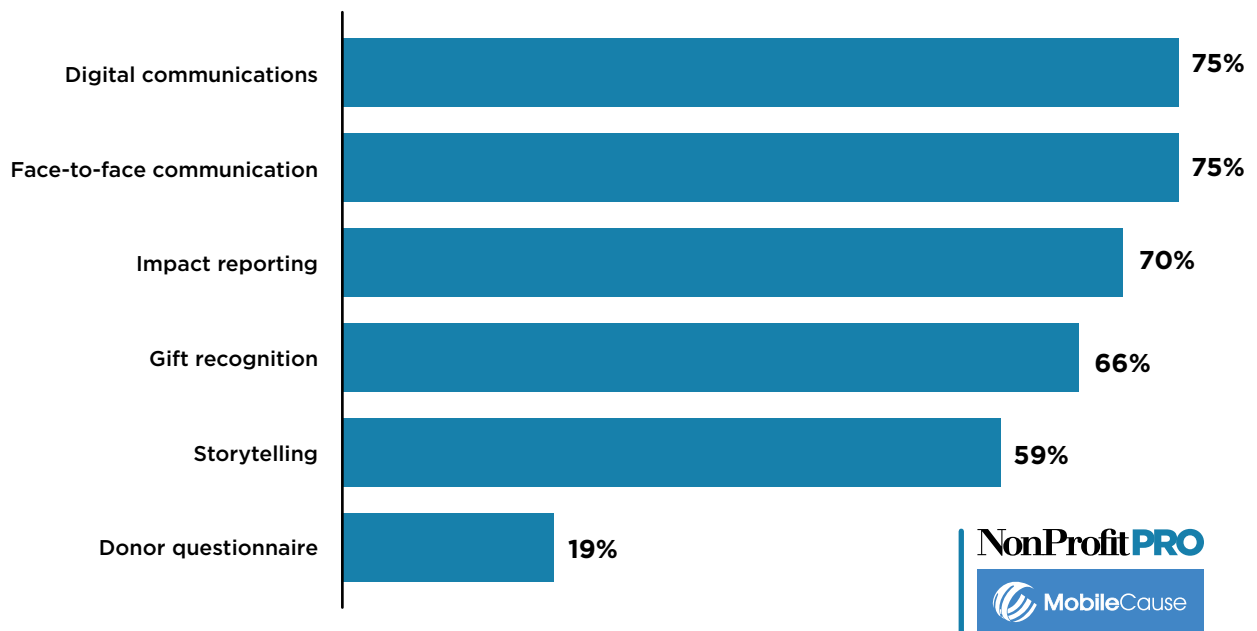


The top donor engagement strategies are digital communications (75 percent), face-to-face communication (74 percent), reporting/explaining impact (70 percent), gift recognition (66 percent) and storytelling (59 percent), which shows that nonprofits are putting most of their efforts on directly engaging their constituents, whether it's face-to-face or digital (social media, email, etc.), in a creative fashion. Storytelling is a up-and-coming and “trendy” form of fundraising, which can be done by written word or with video. With storytelling, nonprofits are able to showcase the kind of work their organization does to potential and existing donors. And this method has the capability of killing two birds with one stone, meaning that it has the potential to engage the nonprofit's targeted audience and show that audience the impact of their donations.

As you can see in the graph below (Figure 8), only 19 percent of nonprofits are utilizing donor questionnaires. This form of engagement can be a bit tedious to put together, but can be extremely beneficial to the organization in enabling nonprofits to stay connected to their evolving and dynamic donor base. With inexpensive tools available online, you can put together a short five-minute survey. The feedback received will be the direct line between you and your donors—you will gain a better understanding of what is working and what needs to be improved on. Of course, you can always get donor feedback through face-to-face communication, but having hard data can help construct next year's strategic plan.

FIGURE 8:

How nonprofits are engaging with donors.



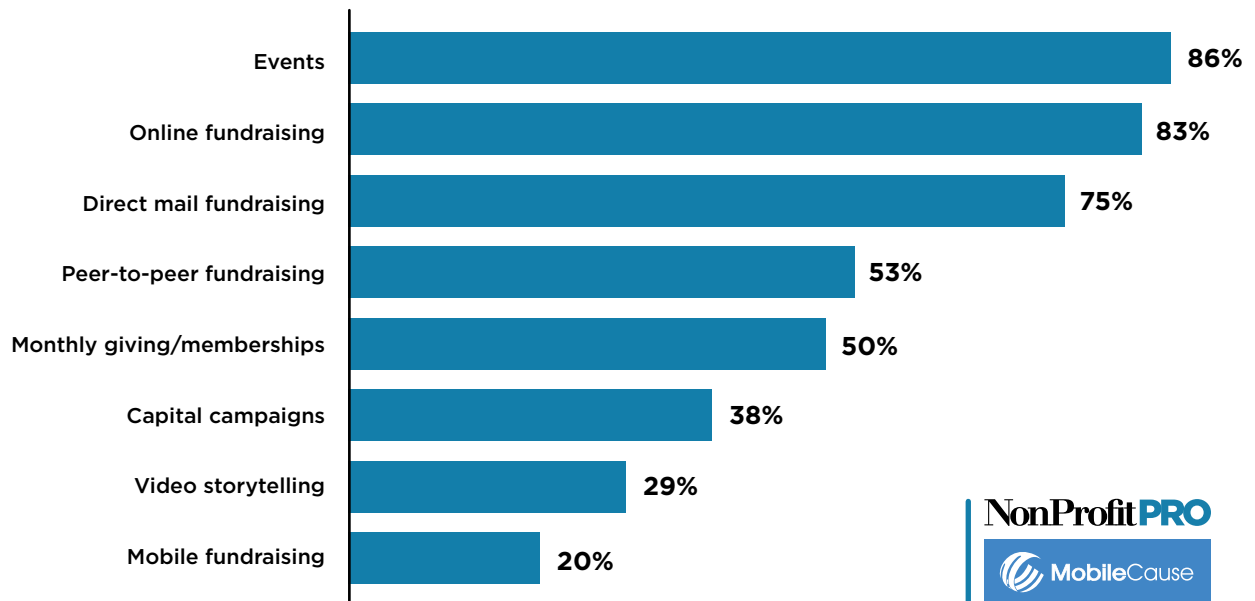
V. SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP TEAMS AND EFFECTIVE FUNDRAISING GO HAND-IN-HAND

Great fundraising does not come to a nonprofit overnight. In general, fundraising takes practice, consistency, persistence and passion for the cause. According to Forbes,¹ the top five largest nonprofits in the U.S. in 2017 were the United Way Worldwide, Task Force for Global Health, Feeding America, the Salvation Army and St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital—all generating over \$1 billion annually. A nonprofit's fundraising success takes a large amount of time, patience and, not to mention, experimentation. Not all nonprofits are built the same; the strategies that work for one nonprofit may not work for another, so it's vital for leadership teams to understand what works for the organization and its donors. This is why successful leadership teams and effective fundraising go hand-in-hand. Once leadership comprehends the value of understanding their organization's donors, those methods and tactics will generate more effective fundraising strategies, which will be implemented throughout the entire organization.

While this is easier said than done, the first important step to understanding your donors and which fundraising strategies will be most effective with them is to first learn about all the fundraising tactics out there. We narrowed the strategies into nine categories: fundraising events, capital campaigns, peer-to-peer fundraising, direct mail fundraising, online fundraising, mobile fundraising, monthly giving/memberships and video storytelling (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9:

Fundraising strategies nonprofits are utilizing.



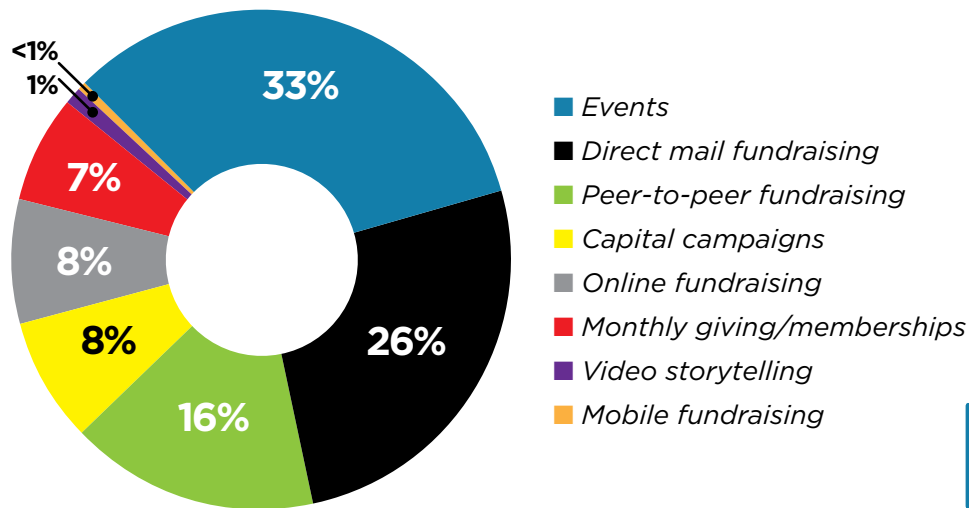
The most popular fundraising strategies are events (86 percent), online fundraising (83 percent), direct mail fundraising (75 percent) and peer-to-peer fundraising (53 percent). While events, online fundraising and direct mail fundraising are the strategies that are most utilized in nonprofits, they did not prove to be the most optimal strategies to implement in a nonprofit's strategy. Respondents said that the top revenue-producing strategies were events (33 percent) and direct mail fundraising (26 percent), but those percentages are not significant enough to be called "top revenue-producing strategies" (Figure 10). These two strategies were followed by peer-to-peer fundraising (16 percent), capital campaigns (8 percent), online fundraising (8 percent), monthly giving/memberships (7 percent), video storytelling (1 percent) and mobile fundraising (0.23 percent). It should be noted that the strategies that fell into the lower spectrum of top revenue-producing strategies were monthly giving, video storytelling and mobile fundraising, which also fell into the lower end of strategies respondents have utilized in their organizations.

Mobile fundraising is the newest strategy to emerge in the nonprofit space, and not enough nonprofits are experimenting with it. We believe that mobile fundraising has a lot of potential, seeing as mobile is the way of the future. Although Millennials and Gen Xers are primarily connected through their mobile devices—social media, checking emails, giving donations—Baby Boomers are also not strangers to appreciating the convenience of their mobile devices.

Nonprofits should be taking advantage of this type of fundraising. A little investment can go an extremely long way, as mobile fundraising can bring in more donations than they expect. According to a report from ReportLinker, 74 percent of people in the U.S. check their phones before breakfast—46 percent check their phones in bed when they first wake up.² Therefore, it's important for nonprofits to make sure that their websites are mobile-friendly for ease-of-use, because there's a possibility of losing potential donors due to a complicated website when they are viewing through mobile devices.

FIGURE 10:

Top revenue-producing fundraising strategies.



While it's clear that nonprofits are taking steps to engage their constituents, how many of these nonprofits are outlining an in-depth, start-to-finish strategic plan for their fundraising initiatives? It is so important for all nonprofits to sit down with their team and come up with an annual goal—whether it's increasing revenue, acquiring more new donors, retaining more donors, number of people benefitting from the organization's work—and set a plan in motion to achieve that goal. Otherwise, nonprofits are going into the next year unprepared and mindlessly setting goals along the way without a means to accomplish them. Deliberately setting a basic strategic fundraising plan in the beginning of the year creates a path toward success. And, of course, no one can predict everything that will happen throughout the year (e.g. new laws), but by already having a strategic plan in place, your nonprofit will have a plan that can be adjusted along the way—instead of having no plan at all, which heightens the stress levels when a major situation arises (e.g. natural disaster).

With that said, it really took us by surprise when we learned that a striking 74 percent of respondents said that their nonprofit does not have a in-depth strategic plan for all of its fundraising initiatives. While these respondents said their nonprofit does not implement a strategic plan for its fundraising initiatives, many of them acknowledged that this is an important area and that their organization is working towards implementing one in 2018.

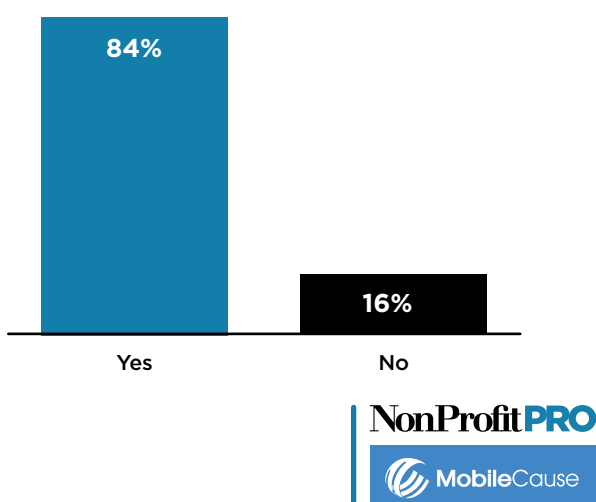
Of the 26 percent of respondents who said that their nonprofit does have a in-depth strategic plan for their fundraising initiatives, some said that their organization's plan needs updating or that the plan needs to be more detailed.

By equipping your nonprofit with a detailed strategic plan, it ensures that your team has set a goal for the year and has prepared plans on achieving that goal. Without one, nonprofits are missing out on the opportunity to optimize their revenue streams and constituent relationships. Having a plan to get where you want will always be more successful than attempts to achieve your goals by “winging it.”

In Figure 9, we noted that events were the most popular fundraising strategy across our survey respondents. Events are a popular staple in fundraising, because they offer the potential to bring in a tremendous amount of donations. This is because there is an experience connected to the event. Whatever the event may be—art show, auction, gala, marathon, sporting event—constituents are donating (paying) to be a part of an event and gain that experience.

Over 84 percent of respondents said that their organization has hosted an event (Figure 11).

Figure 11:
Percentage of nonprofits that have hosted a fundraising event.



What Others Are Saying

“[Our strategic plan] is a comprehensive 12-month strategy that looks at each event, appeal or activity to determine fundraising projections and ROI, and seeks to capture new opportunities in the 12- to 18-month window.”

“We have metrics we use for each fundraising activity—be it an event or a mailing. We segregate mailings depending on audience, and we have strategies for first-time donor retention, major donors and lapsed donors. We also review and update our corporate and foundation grants strategy annually.”

“Our plan outlines each of the strategies we will utilize to reach our foundation, individual and special events goals. There is wiggle room for small ‘friendraising’ events to help build awareness and create a pipeline for future donors.”

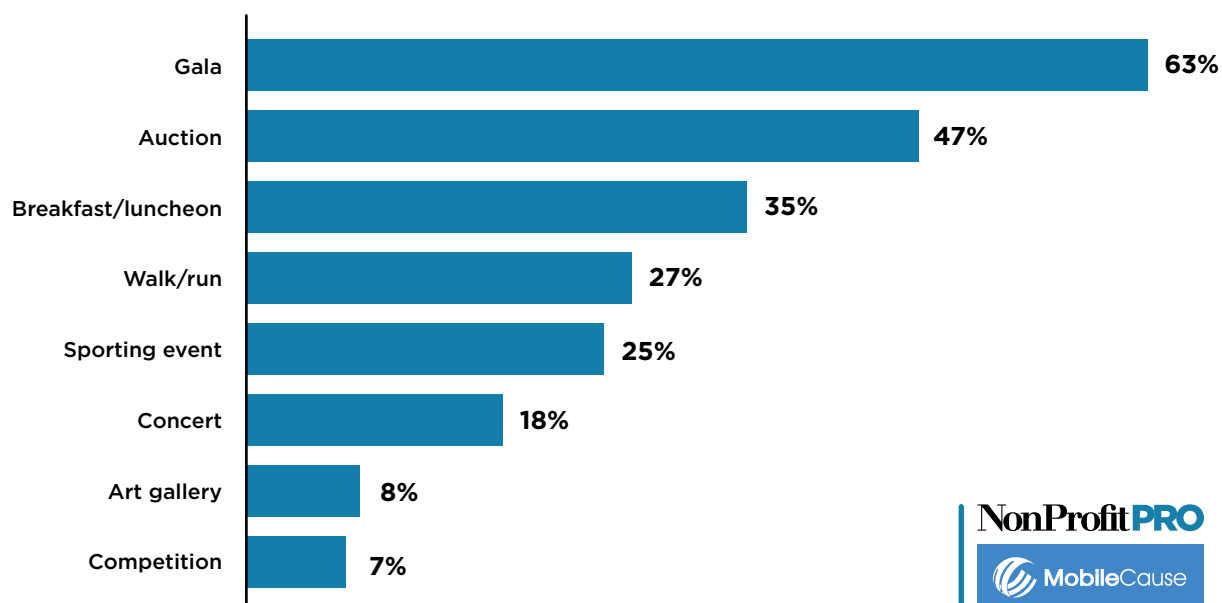
“To fully fund the amazing work we are capable of and the work our community needs us to do, we are committed as part of our new strategic plan to grow existing revenue streams, such as Managed Long-Term Care Centers, and explore others, such as specific funding for groups like veterans or illnesses that don’t have specific funding currently.”

“The organization adheres to a strategic plan that outlines our goals for three years in regard to our annual campaign, endowment drive and planned giving efforts. It also addresses securing in-kind support to decrease our operating costs. Each area has a goal with three to five action steps and a timeline to implement the actions.”

Without a doubt, the top hosted event among our respondents was galas (Figure 12). Sixty-three percent of our respondents said their nonprofit has hosted a gala, followed by an auction (47 percent), a breakfast/luncheon (35 percent), a walk/run (27 percent) and a sporting event (25 percent).

FIGURE 12:

Breakdown of the types of fundraising events.



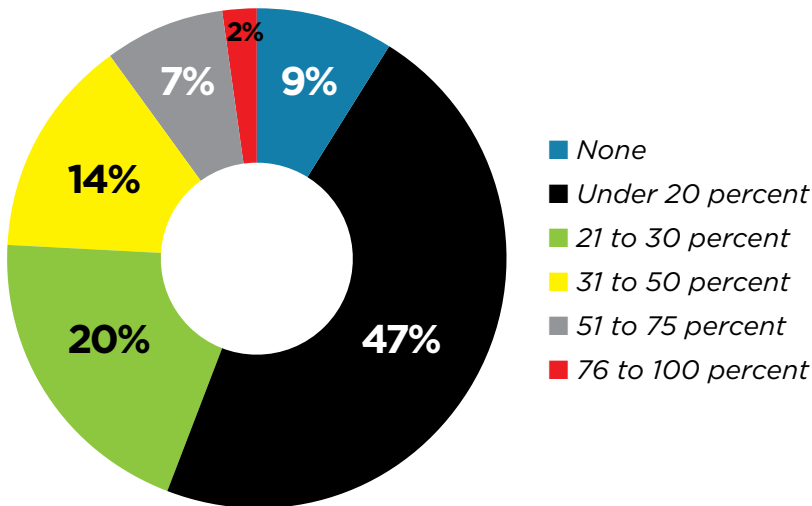
Year-end giving campaigns are a chance for nonprofits to raise more money. These campaigns are highly anticipated. Because of the nature of the holidays, giving typically increases by year end. According to NeonCRM,³ approximately 31 percent of annual giving occurs in December and 12 percent of all giving occurs in the last three days of the year.

And while year-end giving campaigns seem to be a great asset to the nonprofit sector as a whole (remember there are over 1.8 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. alone), how effective are they to individual nonprofits? According to survey results, 47 percent of respondents said that under 20 percent of their fundraising comes from year-end giving campaigns and 20 percent said their fundraising fell between 21 and 30 percent (Figure 13).

Under 24 percent of respondents said that their year-end fundraising reached over 30 percent of its annual fundraising revenue.

FIGURE 13:

Breakdown of fundraising coming from year-end fundraising events.



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VI. A STRONG BOARD OF DIRECTORS MATTERS

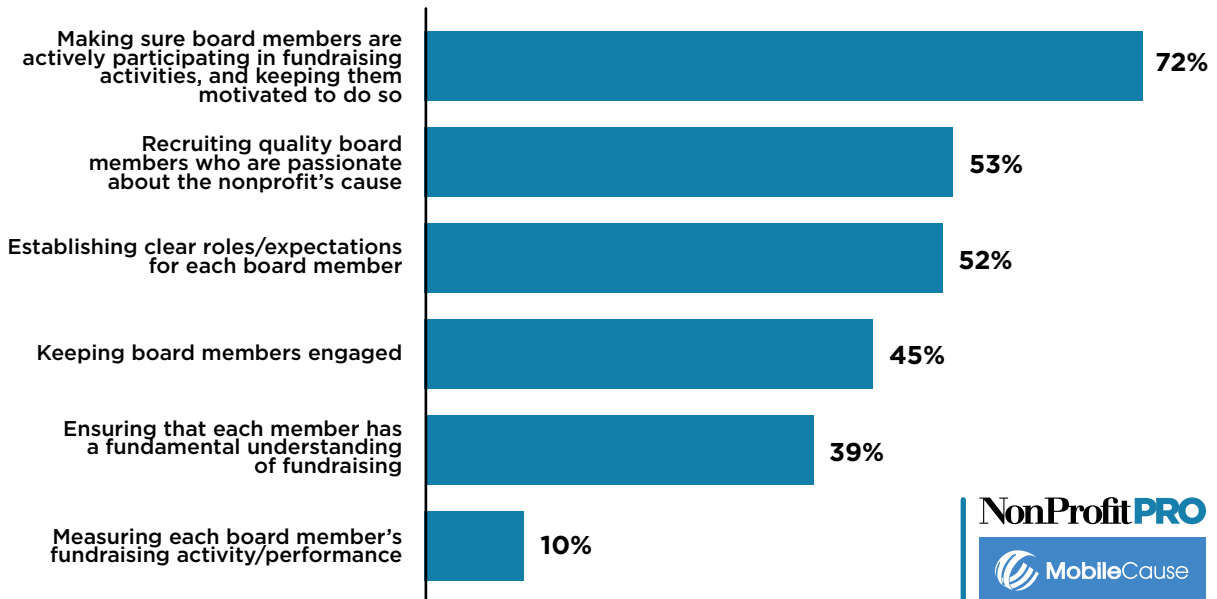
The foundation of a great nonprofit is the people who lead the organization toward its goals—and having a strong board of directors is a great asset to aid the organization and its leaders in reaching their goals.

The main role and responsibility of a nonprofit's board of directors is to “steer the organization toward a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical and legal governance and financial management policies, as well as by making sure the nonprofit has adequate resources to advance its mission.”⁴

The top three challenges of developing/maintaining a board of directors (Figure 14) are making sure board members are actively participating in fundraising activities and keeping them motivated to do so (72 percent), recruiting quality board members who are passionate about the nonprofit's cause (53 percent) and establishing clear roles/expectations for each board member (52 percent).

FIGURE 14:

Challenges of developing/maintaining a nonprofit board of directors.



Developing a board of directors is easier said than done; it takes a lot of time and a lot of research. The people who you choose to be on your board must be reliable, trustworthy, honest and true to your cause, because it's crucial for them to play an active role in your organization—and not idly stand by in a passive role. Another thing to keep in mind when establishing a board or directors is to make sure that whomever you are choosing to put on the board must, first and foremost, put the organization's needs before their own wants. To ensure that your board of directors understand what's at stake when joining, prepare them by being transparent about expectations of their roles and responsibilities.

We found that nearly 40 percent of respondents said that their organization struggles with ensuring that each member has a fundamental understanding about fundraising. While it may be self explanatory, individuals who decide to apply to become board members of a nonprofit or are recruited by a nonprofit should have a basic understanding of what fundraising is or have the basic skill set on how to fundraise effectively. To address this challenge, nonprofits should perform a background check to see whether or not the potential board member has fundraised in the past or has an interest in ongoing, long-term philanthropy. By doing so, nonprofits would eliminate this as a challenge altogether.

Additionally, only 10 percent of respondents see measuring each board member's fundraising activity/performance as a challenge, which leads us to believe that nonprofits do not expect their board members to fundraise effectively. This can be a serious overlooked revenue stream, as board members are usually active members of the community who have numerous connections to high-level donors—those who are willing to give larger gifts over an extended period of time. And these donors would already have some kind of connection to your nonprofit because of a pre-existing relationship with said board member.

VII. TECHNOLOGY PLAYS A ROLE IN ADVANCING NONPROFITS

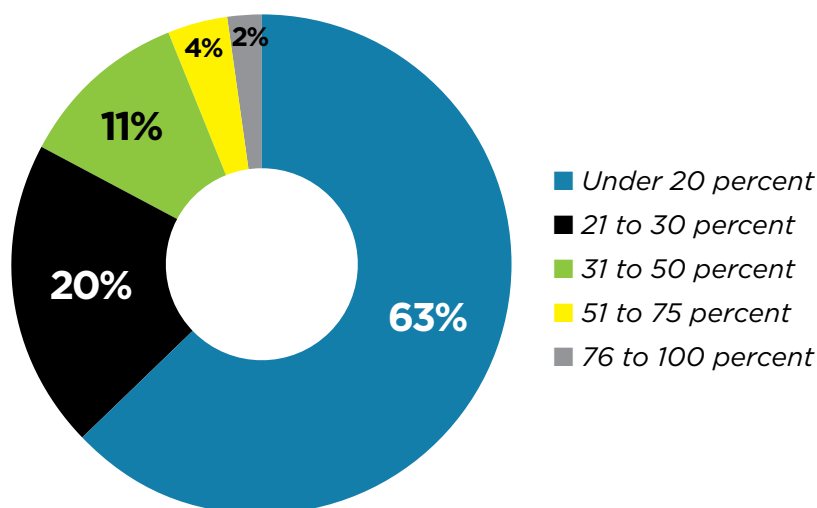
We are in an age where innovation and technological advancement is skyrocketing at an extremely rapid pace. The nonprofit landscape, while still effective at the traditional fundraising methods (e.g. direct mail, face-to-face), is transforming into one that is adopting high-level tactics, such data, analytics and yes, even Artificial Intelligence. We are in an age where reaching out and engaging new and existing donors is only a click away and communication through online platforms is accessible through mobile devices.

Although we have hit the mega jackpot in terms of technology, that's the problem as well. As more technologies come out, the more difficult it is to identify which technologies to implement into your nonprofits and the more complex it is to learn about and stay up-to-date with all of the digital trends.

The lack of understanding about nonprofit technology has the potential to also hinder the organization from reaching its goals. Traditional fundraising strategies are still effective; but without implementing the technologies of today, nonprofits are missing out on the opportunity to optimize their resources by using the strength and fortitude of traditional fundraising in combination with the underestimated power of technology.

According to our respondents, over 63 percent estimate that under 20 percent of their organization's overall fundraising is digital. Almost 20 percent fell between the 21 to 30 percent range, 11 percent fell into the 31 to 50 percent range, 4 percent fell into the 51 to 75 percent range and 2 percent fell into the 76 to 100 percent range (Figure 15).

FIGURE 15:
Percentage breakdown of fundraising that is digital.



Digital fundraising through online communications, such as email and social media, can be an essential asset to a nonprofit's overall revenue stream. Digital platforms have the potential of taking a small nonprofit's fundraising initiative (e.g. raising money for the homeless) viral through methods such as video storytelling. And we mentioned in Figure 9, only 29 percent of nonprofits are taking advantage of this type of fundraising strategy.

Digital fundraising should not be the sole method of a nonprofit's fundraising efforts, but nonprofits should optimize this resource because it holds the opportunity to bring in additional revenue for the organization—and its cause.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In summary, there are plenty of challenges facing our industry. To overcome these challenges and become the best version of our nonprofit that we can be, we have to understand and relate to our staff members, board members, donors and other supporters, or in other words, be premier relationship-builders. We have to stay up-to-date with the latest trends, strategies and technologies, and effectively implement them into our nonprofit strategy.

Most importantly, we have to stay passionate, persistent, patient and resilient.

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4. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/board-roles-and-responsibilities>

- 1 **Nonprofits *need to be* more focused on donor loyalty.**
- 2 **While events are the most popular form of fundraising, nonprofits *need to keep* an open mind and experiment with other strategies.**
- 3 **In order to ensure an organization's success, nonprofits *need to be* more proactive about creating an annual, in-depth strategic plan.**
- 4 **Nonprofits *need to be* more selective in who they choose to sit on their board of directors.**
- 5 **Nonprofits *need to take* full advantage of the benefits technology has to offer.**

WHO WE ARE

NonProfitPRO

NonProfit PRO is the go-to source for nonprofit management and strategy. Developed for thought leaders and innovators, we cover topics ranging from internal issues, such as human resources, board and volunteer management, technology, tax and legal matters, and fundraising. We offer a magazine, website and daily e-newsletter. NonProfit PRO Today, with a fresh look and quick, hard-hitting content as the go-to source for modern nonprofit professionals.

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Contact research@napco.com for a research consultation.



MobileCause helps nonprofit organizations raise more money for their cause while lowering the cost of fundraising. With MobileCause, nonprofits can better communicate with donors, acquire new donors and inspire recurring donations through our engagement platform that accelerates fundraising and donor engagement programs. Take a tour at www.mobilecause.com.

