The Clean Data Checklist for Nonprofits

Approved by

on

Hi there!

Meet your long-lost CRM companion: The Clean Data Checklist is a customizable guide for your nonprofit data procedures, complete with best practices and examples.

Messy data can cost you your time, money, and sanity. We created this resource for any fundraiser who has hit roadblocks while managing their organization's data. From entering constituent details to reporting on accomplishments, it's smooth sailing when all of your team members are on the same page.

So let's get you cleaned up!

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Why clean data matters

Even small mistakes can cause considerable damage, but we're certainly not here to scare you. Every fundraiser has had questions about data entry procedure at some time or another. You learn quickly and move forward. But if you don't know you're making a mistake in the first place, how can you avoid or correct it?

Messy data is caused by errors of omission, duplication, transcription, and more. Establishing proper data procedures saves your organization from issuing corrections, reversing payments, alienating donors, and dipping into funds that were meant for your mission. Not to mention, it paves the way for effortless maintenance, seamless training, and more accurate reporting. There's nothing to lose but your frustration!

Let's walk through a first-time gift, step by step, to ensure that your procedures are chronological and that all necessary tasks are addressed.

- **Step 1:** Donor record information
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Scenario: Blake invited Kristian and their partner Ashley to attend your gala. Kristian and Ashley, known to their friends as Kris and Ash, sat with Blake's company at the gala and were moved to make a first-time gift. Ash filled out a pledge card to give $100 per month, and then provided a check in the amount of $100 to cover this month.

Step 1: Donor record information

Best practice: Before adding a new donor, search through your existing donor records to be sure you do not already have a donor history for them. In DonorPerfect, you can use the Advanced Search screen to look up records using a combination of search terms.

1. **How should a name be formatted?**

   Do you want to use "&" or "and" as a joiner for multiple names? (E.g. "Kristian and Ashley" or "Kristian & Ashley")

   ☐ And
   ☐ &

   Do you use formal names only or do you use nicknames? Which name should come first? Choose the format that reflects your preference.

   ☐ No nicknames
   ☐ Ashley and/& Kristian
   ☐ Kristian and/& Ashley
   ☐ Ash and/& Kris
   ☐ Kris and/& Ash

   If you use nicknames, in what field should that information be stored?

   ☐ Main
   ☐ Salutation
   ☐ Notes
   ☐ Other:

   Create a list of titles (Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc.) and indicate what title should be used first for spouses/partners (e.g. Mrs. Ashley and Mr. Kristian or Mr. Kristian and Mrs. Ashley).

   How do you track spouses with different last names? (E.g. Kristian and Ashley are partners. They live at the same address, but do not share the same last name.)

Best practice: Use an optional line field or sub-category field within the main donor's record to add their spouse or partner's first and last name. Here's how it's done in DonorPerfect.

How do you enter a donor's name in a salutation or mail merge field? Do you use Mr./Mrs. titles? Do you use nicknames?

If the new gift came from an organization instead of an individual, how should the organization name be entered? Should business names be abbreviated? Will you use punctuation? (E.g. Inc vs. Inc.)

What would a salutation field look like for a business? (E.g. Name of the primary contact, generic greeting such as Friend, Supporter, etc.)

Best practice: Find a contact at the business and make a note of their name in a field. Personalizing your communications increases the likelihood that they will open your message and it will resonate. Email subject lines that are personalized are 26 percent more likely to be opened, and 88 percent of marketers in the U.S. saw measurable benefits as a result of personalization.

2. How should an address be formatted?

Do you use abbreviations? (E.g. Dr. Ave. Blvd.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you abbreviate the state?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you write out numbers or use numeric characters? (E.g. 3rd vs. third)

- ☐ 3rd
- ☐ Third

3. **How should a phone number be formatted?**
   - ☐ (xxx) xxx-xxxx
   - ☐ xxx-xxx-xxxx
   - ☐ xxx.xxx.xxxx
   - ☐ (xxx)xxxxxxx
   - ☐ 1(xxx) xxx-xxxx
   - ☐ Other:

4. **Do you use any special labels when creating new donor records?**
   What are your constituent types (e.g. individual) and in what field are they stored?

   What are your other constituent descriptors (e.g. board member) and in what field are they stored?

Best practice: A sub-category field, like Flags in DonorPerfect, can be used to identify how a constituent is affiliated with your organization (e.g. volunteer, board member, vendor, etc.)

5. **Who should be entered as a constituent?**
   - ☐ Donors
   - ☐ Prospects (connected entities who have not contributed financially)
     E.g. Only Ashley made a gift at the gala, but Kristian also attended, and therefore could be interested in contributing in the future.
   - ☐ Volunteers
   - ☐ Vendors
   - ☐ Program participants
   - ☐ Influencers

6. **How do you enter notes or use the narrative field?**
   What type of data should be tracked in the narrative field? (Use this to store data that will not be reported on, but is relevant to your relationship with the donor. E.g. Ashley's father was a professionally trained cellist, making our cause important to her.)

Best practice: When you add a note it is helpful to include the date and your initials so your team knows if the information is current and who to reach out to if they have questions.

Does security need to be applied to the narrative field?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Best practice: Need to control who can access this field and change its information? Your CRM should allow you to apply user controls to certain screens. In DonorPerfect, you can use the Screen Designer to manage the User Group Settings for a specific field. This can be helpful when working with volunteers and interns who don't need full access.

7. How do you document contact restrictions?

What "do not" contact types do you track?

☐ Do not mail

☐ Do not email

☐ Do not call

☐ Do not text

In what field(s) do you note contact restrictions?

Do you note contact restriction reasons? If so, in which field?

In what instances should someone be removed from the database as opposed to being marked with contact restrictions?

Best practice: When marking constituents with contact restrictions, be sure to include a reason for their preference. This will help you determine if the reason is temporary or permanent.

Step 2: Gift entry

1. **What types of donations do you accept?**
   - ☐ Cash
   - ☐ Check
   - ☐ Online
   - ☐ ACH
   - ☐ In-kind
   - ☐ Stocks
   - ☐ Other:

2. **What coded fields do you use to keep track of your fundraising efforts?**

General ledger:	Track the revenue stream/fund/program a gift is donated towards (often this will coincide with accounting codes), e.g. operating costs, program costs
Campaign:	Fundraising strategy comprised of multiple individual efforts, e.g. capital, annual
Solicitation or appeal:	Specific fundraising efforts responsible for gifts being made, typically fall under a campaign, e.g. newsletters, mail appeals, events
Sub-solicitation or further specification:	Specific revenue stream (if there are multiple streams associated with one solicitation), e.g. ticket sales, sponsorships, raffles, etc.

3. **How will you prioritize thank-you letter templates?**
   (E.g. If first-time donor Ashley makes a gift through a specific appeal, and your organization has a first-time donor thank-you template *and* an appeal-specific thank-you template, which one will Ashley receive?)

4. **What type of data should be stored in the gift narrative field?**
   - ☐ User initials
   - ☐ Input date
   - ☐ Allow sensitive information?
   - ☐ Other:

Best practice: Establish a priority order for your thank-you templates to ensure donors don't receive multiple letters for the same gift. It's easy to do this in DonorPerfect - we encourage you to prefill the thank-you letter codes based on criteria that you specify!

Special gift considerations

1. **How should first-time gifts be entered?**
   What fields are required when entering a first-time gift? Do you have an alert set up to notify the appropriate team member?

   How should first time gifts be coded?

   What report(s) should be pulled to see first-time gifts?

Best practice: Keep your first-time donors around by being attentive to their interests and informative of your programs. See if your CRM can automatically alert you when you have a new donor to welcome.

2. **How should pledges be entered?**
   What fields are required? (E.g. bill amount, total pledged, frequency)

   Do you accept electronic and check payments towards pledges?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

   How do you track a pledge with a closed time frame? (E.g. Blake will donate $3500 over the next three years)

   How do you track a pledge with an open time frame? (E.g. Ashley made a commitment to donate $100 per month)

Best practice: In hopes of raising more money and increasing donor retention, we recommend using automatic monthly giving. However, you can set pledges to process limited amounts too. DonorPerfect has simple processes for entering pledges with open and closed time frames.

Do you accept electronic and check payments for recurring gifts?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What pledge frequencies do you accept and track?

Do you allow unknown pledge payment schedules?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you thank pledges or just pledge payments?

Should pledges or pledge payments be included in financial reports? (E.g. Ashley filled out a pledge card to pay $3600 over the next three years and provided a check in the amount of $100 to cover this month.)

- ☐ Pledges
- ☐ Pledge Payments

What report(s) should be pulled to see pledges?

How do you follow up with a pledge that has an unknown schedule?

Best practice: Set reminders to quickly generate invoices for upcoming and outstanding pledge payments. In DonorPerfect, you can use Pledge Reminders, or use the Contacts tab to set up Scheduled Outreach and assign a team member to check in with donors.

3. How should recurring gifts be entered?

Best practice: Try a monthly giving program to keep donors engaged with your mission and aware of the impact they are making. Download our free Monthly Giving Starter Kit to kick off your program!

What fields are required? (E.g. Frequency, bill amount, payment information)

Do you accept electronic and check payments towards recurring gifts?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How should recurring gifts be coded?

What recurring gift frequencies do you accept and track?

How do you track if a recurring gift was made?

How often is a recurring gift acknowledged?

- ☐ Every time a gift is made
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Quarterly
- ☐ Annually
- ☐ Other:

How will you be alerted if a recurring gift schedule lapsed?

What report(s) should be pulled to see recurring gifts?

What report(s) should be pulled to see if a credit card has or will expire?

Best practice: While you may not send a letter for every recurring gift, create a plan to update monthly donors with impact updates every few months to keep them engaged in your program. These updates can also serve as reminders to update their card information if there have been any changes. In DonorPerfect, the Account Updater service automatically updates credit card information for your recurring gifts.

4. **How should soft credits be entered (i.e. acknowledging an individual who was responsible for acquiring a donation that was given by someone else)?**

   What fields are required?

   How should soft credits be coded?

   Are there any additional rules to documenting soft credits?

   What report(s) should be pulled to see soft credits?

   Do you send a thank you for soft credits?

5. **How should matching gifts be entered?**

   What fields are required?

   How should matching gifts be coded?

   Are there any additional rules to documenting matching gifts?

   What report(s) should be pulled to see matching gifts?

Best practice: For accurate tracking, create a constituent record for the company that matched a gift in addition to the giver. The DonorPerfect way: Double the Donation maintains a database of companies with matching gift programs to inform donors when they qualify and simplify the process.

6. **How should in-kind gifts be entered (i.e. donating goods or services instead of money)?**

   What fields are required? (E.g. Fair market value, item description)

   How should in-kind gifts be coded?

   Are there any additional rules to documenting in-kind gifts?

   What report(s) should be pulled to see in-kind gifts?

Best practice: Use two separate fields for tracking in-kind gifts. Use the first field to categorize your in-kind gifts (e.g. food, clothing) and a second field for a detailed description of the items (e.g. 20 cans of vegetables) to use in your thank-you letter.

7. **How should event gifts be entered?**

   What fields are required?
   (E.g. Solicitation/appeal or sub-solicitation/event revenue stream)

   How should event gifts be coded?

   Are there any additional rules to documenting event gifts? Do you have a process for documenting partially tax-deductible gifts? Is there a fair market value associated with ticket sales to an event you host?

What report(s) should be pulled to see event gifts?

8. **How should donor-advised funds (DAFs) be handled?**
   What fields are required?

   How should gifts from a DAF be coded?

   Are there any additional rules to documenting gifts from a DAF?
   E.g. Who should be thanked and how?

   What report(s) should be pulled to see gifts from a DAF?

Best practice: Identify how you will include donors who give through a donor-advised giving fund when generating donor recognition reports. If you get stuck, here's a free, simplified guide to get started with DAFs.

Step 3: Gift followup

Best practice: Without much time or effort, you can get creative with thanking and receipting for more meaningful exchanges with your donors. With DonorPerfect, you have the opportunity to explain gift impact through video and text! You can also add dynamic fields that pull in donor data like name, gift amount, and more. Download the Digital Donor Thank-You Kit >>

1. **What are your methods of receipting?**
   (E.g. First-time donor welcome packet, letter, email, video message)

When should a user be designated with a different method of receipting? (E.g. First-time donor welcome packet, letter, email, video message)

When should a record be marked as “do not acknowledge”?

Should anyone with an email address on file get an email receipt?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Should certain donors like board members, volunteers, or major donors receive special recognition? If so, how is that noted?

Step 4: Tracking points of contact

1. **What type of contact activities do you track/record?**
   Define the types. (E.g. email, mail, phone call, in-person visit, etc.)

   How do you document each type?

2. **What type of data should be recorded in the description of the point of contact?**
   - ☐ Contact method
   - ☐ Initials of person who made the contact
   - ☐ Initials of person who entered the contact
   - ☐ Input date
   - ☐ Next action date
   - ☐ Next action type
   - ☐ Summary of contact (E.g. Spoke to Ashley on the phone)
   - ☐ Allow sensitive information

3. **What report(s) should be pulled to see points of contact?**

Step 5: Data integrity maintenance

Avoiding duplicates

1. **How often should a duplicate report be run?**
   E.g. Quarterly, monthly, before reportings or mailings

2. **Should a backup be created prior to merging duplicate records?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

3. **Should data of duplicated records be exported and saved prior to completing a merge?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

Address cleanup

1. **Do you need additional tools to keep your addresses up to date (e.g. National Change of Address, Canadian Change of Address)?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

2. **How often should reports be run to check for donors with incomplete addresses?**
   E.g. Quarterly, monthly, before major mailings

3. **How should records with incomplete addresses be handled?**
   - ☐ Set preferences for communication to email
   - ☐ Mark record as “do not send mail”
   - ☐ Search for correct addresses
   - ☐ Remove record from database depending on type of involvement/level of active engagement

Best practice: An average company spends as much as $180,000 a year on direct mail that does not reach its audience because of incorrect mailing addresses or deceased donors. Tools like DP Address Updater can keep your donors' contact information up-to-date automatically.

Donor record removal

1. **Is it ever appropriate to delete a donor record?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

2. **How often should donor records be monitored for removal?**

3. **What should qualify a donor for removal?**
   - ☐ Period of inactivity (Ex. No giving history in the last 7 years)
   - ☐ Only contributed through a memorial/honorarium gift
   - ☐ Multiple touch points with no response
   - ☐ Deceased

4. **What should happen to records before removal?**
   Should donor data be exported first? If so, what template should be used?

   Where should this information be saved?

5. **Should removed records be checked before a new donor is added to verify possible past involvement?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

Best practice: Be sure to check your organization's removed records before sending a first-time donor letter to ensure you are fully aware of a donor's giving history with your organization.

Code maintenance

1. **How often should codes be reviewed and marked as inactive?**
   E.g. Quarterly, monthly, before adding your new annual appeal

2. **Do you have a policy around monitoring codes?**
   E.g. Search for codes by keyword, field, etc. to prevent duplication

3. **What are your naming conventions for codes?**
   E.g. Year listed first, year listed in four-digit or two-digit format, appeal name included

Best practice: When setting up your user-defined codes, think about what you plan to do with them in the long term to avoid limitations in the future. Standardize your codes as much as possible, publicize them to train staff on their use, and perform regular audits for code removal.

Congratulations!

The work you've just completed will save countless hours and headaches in the future - for you, your teammates, and your future teammates! Your nonprofit data is meant to help your organization make more informed decisions that will ultimately lead to more revenue for your mission, not make your job harder than it needs to be.

We hope that these guidelines and best practices help you paint a clearer picture of your constituency for more successful fundraising efforts. A fundraiser's work is never truly done, and new gifts will keep on coming. Proper procedures ensure that you're ready for anything that's ahead.

Thank you for taking the Clean Data Checklist on your journey to optimal data health! On the Resources page below, you'll find free webinars and blog articles to put these procedures into practice.

Resources

Webinars

Merging Duplicates
Data Entry 101
Reconciling Transactions in DonorPerfect
Data Clean-Up in DonorPerfect

Blogs

Use LYBUNT and SYBUNT Reports to Raise Donor Retention
Start a Monthly Giving Program in 5 Simple Steps
Identify Major Donor Prospects Hiding in Your Database
Create Donor Segments for Your Year-End Campaign
Prepare Your Database for Year-End Fundraising
Track Email Engagements in Your CRM

DonorPerfect Support

Call, email or chat our support representatives anytime you need assistance!
Phone: 215-628-4343
Email: support@donorperfect.com

"The support department is fantastic. I deleted a field that should not have been deleted. The numbers weren't there - they were gone. I called for help. They figured out what my mistake was and restored everything – and set up filters and formulas so that it wouldn't happen again."
- Dana, Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services