Design Tips for Nonprofits

with tips from design expert Abby Guido

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Show, don't tell

With an estimated [1.6 million charitable organizations](#) currently operating in the United States and 170,000 charities and nonprofits across Canada, it can be challenging to stand out from the crowd. You and your nonprofit team have the ideas, drive, and passion to make a real difference in people's lives, but without the right marketing and design strategies, potential donors may not know how to support you, and potential beneficiaries may not know they can rely on you for help.

According to an [MIT study](#), our brains can process entire images in as little as 13 milliseconds. Thoughtful use of images and design can quickly tell an entire story, stand out in a sea of social media posts, and leave them wanting to learn more about you and your mission. Design can help with consistent branding as well, lending to your nonprofit's credibility and recognizability. When you build trust with online donors, you build a foundation for better donor retention.

If this all sounds nice but too expensive, don't give up - here are your tips and tricks for using essential principles of design, even if you don't have the design experience or the budget to work with an agency.

Building a Brand

Your nonprofit's brand is so much more than a logo: it's a visual shorthand for everything you want your audience to know and feel about your organization. Consistent branding means your audience will recognize, trust, and rely on your nonprofit's communications, and you will be at the top of prospective donors' minds when they're looking for the right organization to support.

Develop a look and feel

Whether you're starting from scratch or you're working to refine your donor communications, make sure to start with your **why**. Your mission and values will drive the look and feel of your brand, creating a visual ethos that is authentic and unique to your nonprofit.

Try brainstorming a list of keywords, including verbs, emotions, and anything you want to convey to your audience when they see your logo. Are you welcoming? Innovative? Do you like to push boundaries, or do you provide comfort and solace to your community? Once you settle on your favorites, use them as a steady reference point for all branding decisions that follow.

PRO TIP

"**Brainstorming Tip:** Gather your stakeholders together and provide each person with a stack of Post-it Notes and a marker. Explain your objective of creating a list of words that will communicate your brand personality. Set a timer for 10 minutes and ask everyone to write one word per Post-it that comes to mind. Be sure to encourage them to use as many Post-its as needed. When the time is up place the Post-it's on a wall and as a team, and work to group the similar or repeated words. You will see themes emerge that will help you narrow down the results. Aim to land on five words that represent your brand personality."

- Abby Guido, Abby Ryan Design

Who is your audience, actually?

Comb through your database, spend some time at events observing attendees and volunteers, or send out surveys to supporters and beneficiaries to learn more about them as people. You can also learn a lot about your audience's preferences with one-on-one interviews. Set up some time with donors, volunteers, staff, beneficiaries, and anyone else in your community to understand their feelings about your nonprofit and to see if there are design elements that make people respond more positively.

Once you have a sense for who makes up your audience, try creating a few different personas that capture the essential characteristics of each type of person to whom you'd like to speak. Whether you're writing or designing, imagine you're speaking to that person alone, and predict how they might respond.

PRO TIP

" **Persona Tip:** One of the most important aspects of a persona is pain points. These can be gathered through stakeholder interviews, an example may look like this:

'I would like to volunteer but it isn't always clear what volunteer opportunities are available.'

You should aim to have three to five pain points for each persona."

- Abby Guido, Abby Ryan Design

Mid-level Melanie

💼 Healthcare professional who prioritizes her career

👥 Married with 2 children

💝 Gives $500 every year around the holidays

📣 Prefers direct mail appeals

🤝 Interested in volunteering in the future but doesn't always know what opportunities are available

🔍 Would benefit from regular stewardship and program updates, and may be open to information on planned giving

Don't reinvent the color wheel

The right color palette can hold a lot of power. In addition to creating a streamlined look for your brand, color theory - which colors work well together and why - can be used to invoke specific emotions and associations. You don't have to be an expert to make good use of this power - free resources like Adobe Color can help you create a cohesive color palette, or even generate one from a preexisting image.

❌ **PRESET COLORS**

✅ **CUSTOM COLORS**

Picking (and using) the right font

Don't let your font overshadow your message: unless you're using a specific typeface as part of a broader image, prioritize simplicity and ease of use. When testing different fonts, put the same text next to each other to visually compare and choose the option that's most comfortable to read.

Suggested sans serif fonts:

Proxima Nova   Helvetica Neue   Avenir   Montserrat   Roboto   Verdana

❌ **SERIF**

**Your data in one place.
Your staff on the same page.**

DonorPerfect is accessible to an unlimited amount of users no matter where they're based. Fundraise confidently with the tools that align staff around organizational goals and equip our users to...

✅ **SANS-SERIF**

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❌ CENTERED TYPE

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✅ LEFT-ALIGNED

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❌ COLORED TYPE

Your data in one place.
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✅ GREYSCALE TYPE

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DonorPerfect is accessible to an unlimited amount of users no matter where they're based. Fundraise confidently with the tools that align staff around organizational goals and equip our users to...

PRO TIP

Type Tip: Font selection can get more complex when you pair together two typefaces. As you first start to explore fonts, try to find a font superfamily. A superfamily is a typeface that comes with a variety of styles. For example, Alegreya is a Google font that has both a serif and a san-serif in the same family. These families have been designed to use together and will guarantee you aren't pairing together two fonts that will compete for your reader's attention."

- Abby Guido, Abby Ryan Design

What makes for a good logo?

Ideally, [your logo](#) will allow viewers to quickly recognize your organization and the specific feelings that come with it. While many organizations use literal images of their products or services, symbols and icons can be equally, if not more, effective. The Nike swoosh, for example, is a simple symbol that is easy to comprehend, and implies a sense of speed and momentum that makes perfect sense for an athletic brand.
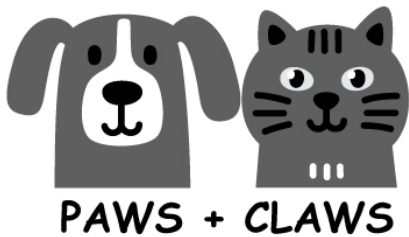
✖ ILLUSTRATIVE LOGO   **✔ SIMPLE LOGO**

A good logo is also versatile and timeless. Does it look good on light and dark backgrounds? Can you use it for your website, an appeal letter, an event invitation, a donation receipt, a t-shirt, or billboard? Imagine each way your organization interacts with the public, and if your idea for a logo makes sense in every context, it's a keeper.

PRO TIP

> One common approach to logo design is to use a visual metaphor. A visual metaphor is a person, place, thing, or idea that is used to symbolize something else. For example, a pencil is sometimes used as a visual metaphor for education. To elevate your idea further you can combine two images for your visual metaphor. For example, if you take a pencil and merge it with a rocket your logo may convey the idea of education in the future."

- Abby Guido, Abby Ryan Design

Create a brand guide

It's crucial for you, your team, your volunteers, and anyone who uses your brand to be in lockstep with each other. Creating a brand guide will help unify how everyone in your nonprofit communicates with the public, strengthening your supporters' trust in you. Even with staff and volunteer turnover, a brand guide ensures the outside world sees a consistent image and set of symbols that they can always associate with your nonprofit.

Create a shared document that outlines where to find your logo, preferred color palette, preferred fonts, and any other relevant branding information you think would be helpful to staff and volunteers, now and in the future. How and when should your logo be used? Do you have templates for social media posts, event programs, or other frequently used media?

This can be a living document that evolves as you develop more uses for your logo and brand. Once everyone in your organization has access to these shared resources, you'll be totally in sync and ready to share a unified message far and wide. Try our free brand guide here.

Paws + Claws Logo

Typography

Headings: Open Sans, Bold, Navy

Text: Open Sans, Regular, Grey

Links: Graphik, Regular, Blue, Underlined

CTA: OPEN SANS, BOLD, WHITE UPPERCASE

IMAGERY

Colors

PRIMARY

Navy
Hex: #003A63

Yellow
Hex: #F4AE18

Grey
Hex: #5F5F5F

SECONDARY

Blue
Hex: #00B8F9

Purple
Hex: #BD9FE5

Silver
Hex: #E4E9ED

HOW FAR CAN YOUR BRAND GO?

- Your nonprofit's website
- Social media
- Online forms
- Crowdfunding pages
- Appeal letters
- Event invitations, programs, tickets, and other collateral
- Tax receipts
- Volunteer t-shirts
- Email newsletters and fundraising campaigns
- Blog posts
- TV and radio ads
- And more!

TOOLS AND INSPIRATION

Hubspot blog: learn more about brands and brand identity

Look to your favorite nonprofits and see what you can learn from their branding choices

Designing a website

Creating a website that works for different devices

Your users will interact with your nonprofit's website on a variety of devices, and it's important that your website is up to the task. Many website builders, including DonorPerfect's partner Givecloud, allow you to preview your website as it appears on a desktop, smartphone, or tablet and use drag-and-drop templates for easy design help.

Knowing that people will navigate with their mouse, finger, or a touchpad, make sure to prioritize ease for the user. If a reader is frustrated by how challenging it is to get to the page or content they want to see, they're likely to leave your website before taking any meaningful action.

PRO TIP

" A common misstep in web design is too many navigational choices. Write all of the content areas you would like to include on your site. These may look like: mission statement, founding story, leadership team, volunteer opportunities, donations, upcoming events, contact information, future goals.

Next, group together information and create categories they fall under. For example, mission statement, founding story, and leadership team could all fall under the category of "About Us." This exercise is called **card sorting** and can be executed by multiple stakeholders to gather varying opinions. In total, you should be shooting for four to seven top navigation options."

- Abby Guido, Abby Ryan Design

Readability and accessibility

Everyone who wants to support your nonprofit should be able to interact with your website. Unfortunately, a badly designed website could make it difficult or even impossible for people with disabilities to interact with your nonprofit. Luckily, the Web Accessibility Initiative has compiled a collection of helpful resources to learn more and evaluate your website for accessibility.

It's also important to ensure all users can easily navigate your website. Users want to be able to find whatever they're looking for quickly and easily, and if they can't, they're likely to leave your page before making a gift or signing up to volunteer. Here are some tricks to quickly improve your website's navigation.

Inspire your audience with effective calls to action

Now that your audience is inspired by your mission, they need somewhere to direct their energy. The more specific, the better! "Learn more" can sometimes be useful, but a strong, direct, and clear call to action (CTA) can help combat decision fatigue and motivate your audience to act the way you hope they will.

CTAs can include links to learn more, specific instructions (such as, "sign up to volunteer today!"), giving buttons, and more. They should visually draw the reader in without creating too much visual bloat - otherwise, your page might load too slowly or your audience will become visually overwhelmed and stop interacting with your page before they take meaningful action.

Determine your primary CTA, or the main behavior you want your audience to engage with, and have that be the primary visual focus. Any other CTAs can be considered secondary, and should have less visual volume.

Designing a Form

Whether for collecting online donations, supporter surveys, or volunteer information, online forms make it easy for your supporters to engage with your nonprofit.

Hero image to the rescue!

A hero image is the first thing your reader sees when they open your email. It can be a photo, gif, video, or other visual cue to indicate what the reader should expect from the rest of the email.

The right design may remind prospective donors of how much they care about your mission, right before they settle on a gift amount. Your logo and a personal photo showing your nonprofit's success will show your donors that they're part of something bigger than themselves. If that's not an option yet, a well-placed, high-quality stock photo will work too.
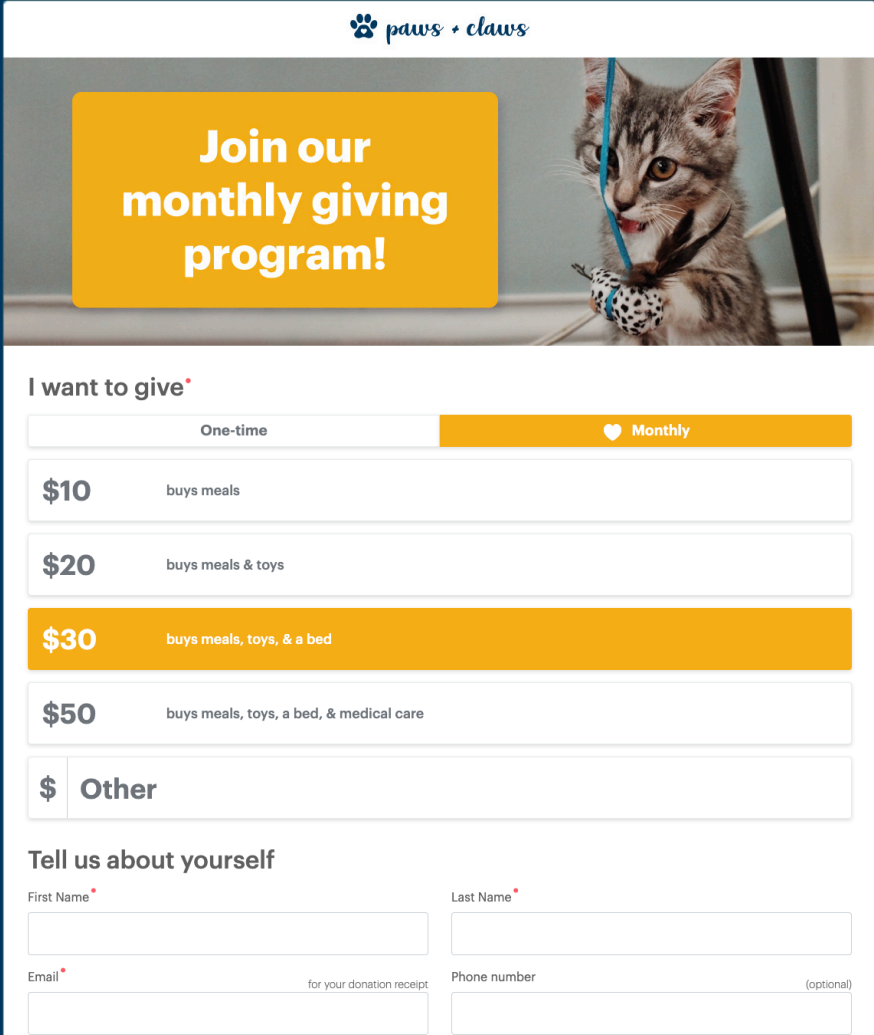
Choosing the right colors

When your online form colors match your brand standards, it adds credibility to your form and gives viewers a sense of familiarity. Above all, make sure your form is easy to read and interact with. Can you read the form without much effort on a variety of devices? Is it up to par with accessibility standards? The most beautiful color palette in the world won't generate more revenue for your nonprofit if donors can't read the text on the page!

How to make online form user-friendly

An estimated 68% of prospective donors don't complete online donation forms after they start, leaving valuable gifts on the table that could otherwise be put to good use. Here are some of the top reasons prospective donors abandon online donations:

- **Requiring users to sign in:** requiring repeat donors to remember yet another username and password will nip their motivation to give in the bud. Your donors want to make a gift **right now**, and removing any obstacles or barriers in giving will make sure they follow through. Even if you have a donor portal, make sure to also include an option to check out as a guest.

- **The donation form is too long, or requires too many clicks:** if your donation form is cumbersome or takes a long time to complete, prospective donors are more likely to get distracted before they complete their donation. Only require information that is absolutely necessary for gift processing, tax receipting, and following up with a personalized thank-you. You can always follow up later with optional surveys if your donors would like to share what inspires them to give, or if you would like to gather more information.

- **The donation form doesn't work on a variety of devices:** your donors may want to make gifts when they're in their kids' school pickup line, in the waiting room at the dentist, or even on the stationary bike at the gym. If your online form isn't mobile-friendly, you're missing out on prospects who may not remember to finish making their gift the next time they're at a computer.

- **The donation form is focused more on the nonprofit than the user experience:** for example, asking prospective donors to include an appeal code found in tiny print at the bottom of the last letter they received from your nonprofit may make managing your data easier, but puts a massive burden on your donors that may discourage them from giving. When designing an online form, make sure to run through it as if you were a prospective donor, and see how long it takes to fill it out and if there are any unnecessary obstacles in the way of making a gift.

TOOLS AND INSPIRATION

DonorPerfect Online Forms

Monthly giving form template

Online Forms Success Hub
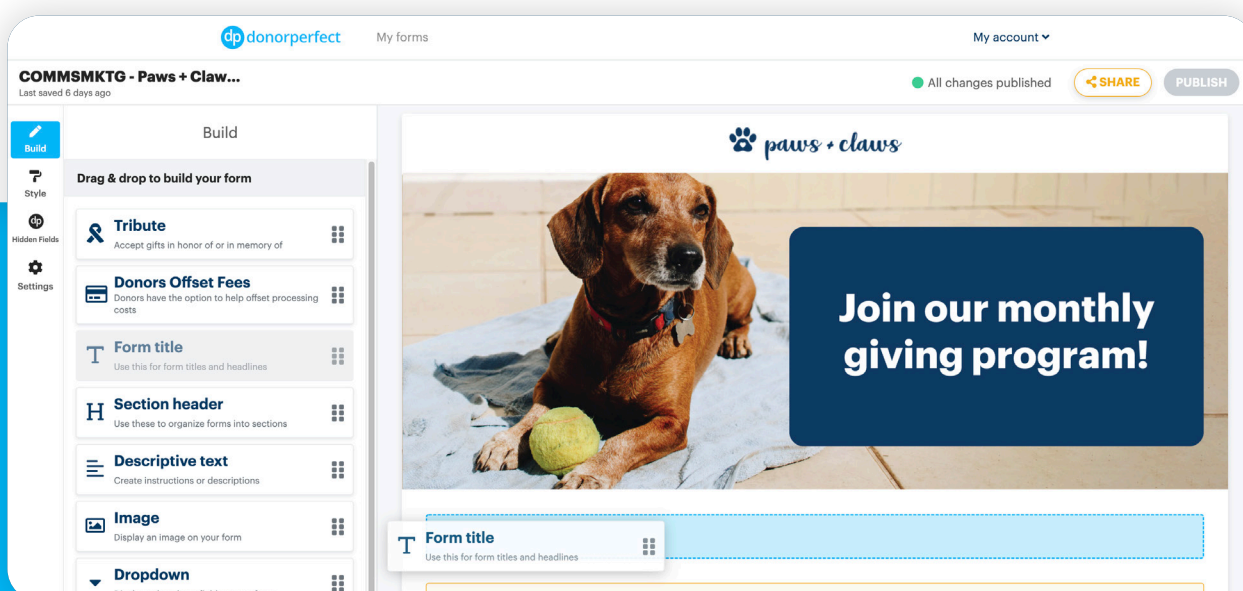
Designing an email

Creating an email hero

Like with forms, your opening image sets the tone for your email.

When picking an email hero, consider what you want your audience to think and feel right away. Studies have shown that prospective donors respond more generously to positive images and messages, like rescued puppies thriving with their new families, than negative messages, like sad puppies in a kennel. When you start your emails with images of your nonprofit's success, your readers can't help but join in the momentum.

CONSTANT CONTACT EMAIL TEMPLATES

With DonorPerfect's Constant Contact integration, you can quickly and easily create beautiful, branded email templates so you can spend less time designing and more time reaching your audience!
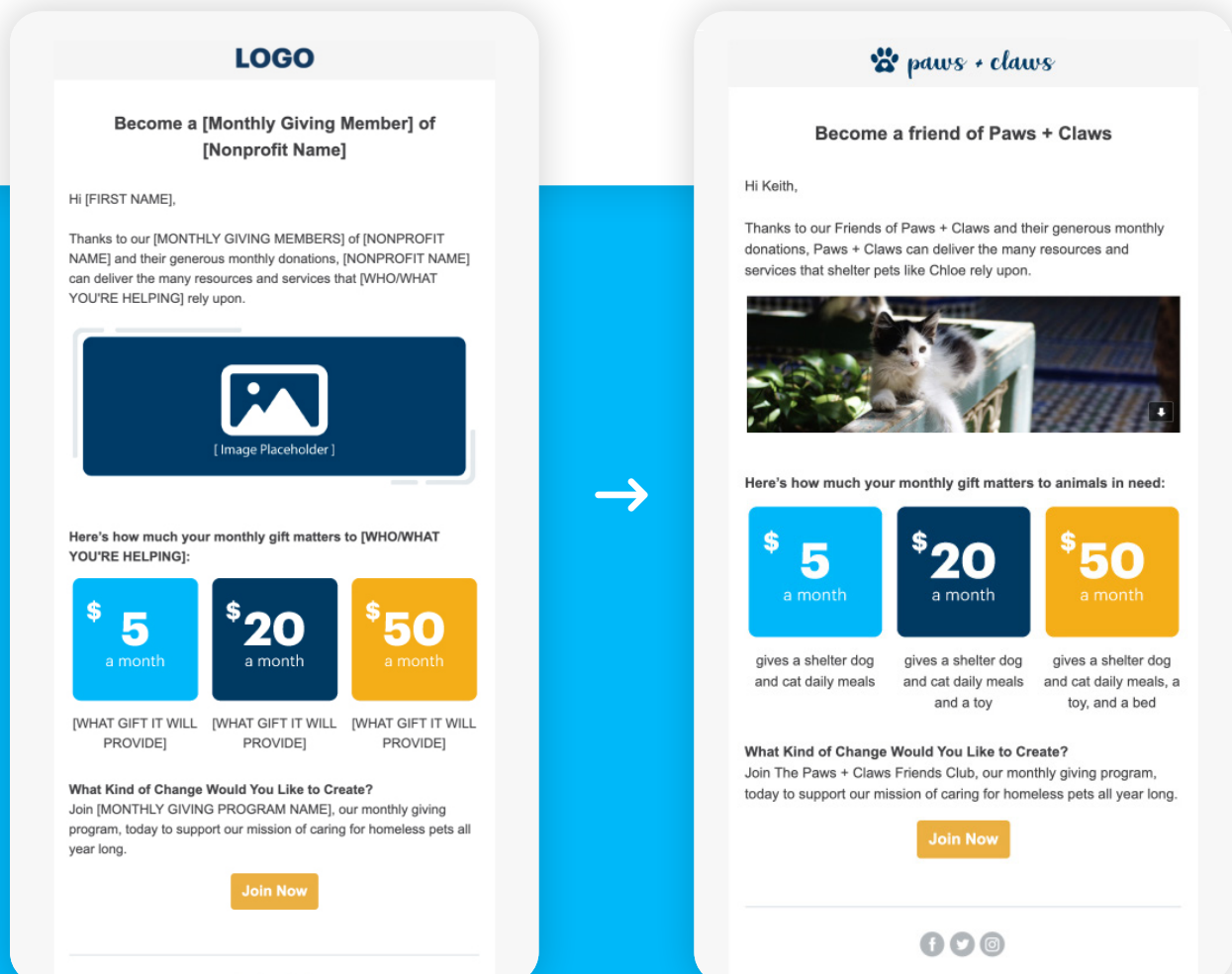
Make your call to action stand out

While many readers typically absorb text in an orderly, top-to-bottom, left-to-right fashion, studies of heat maps show that before they start to read, users' eyes are first drawn to parts of a piece that have the most visual "weight." Try testing this by designing your call to action, such as a giving button or a link to a volunteer signup form, in a way that your readers' eyes will be drawn right to it.

Simply offsetting your call to action, with something like bolded text or a bulleted list, will create enough visual interest that - even if your audience doesn't read the email all the way through - they will be drawn to the most important pieces of information.

TOOLS AND INSPIRATION

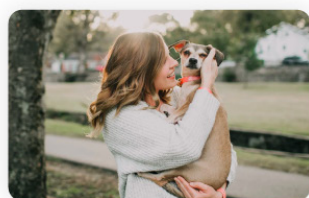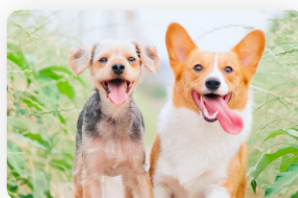Sign up for other nonprofits' email lists and see what you do and don't like about their communications

Create an image library so your audience will see photos that are specific to your nonprofit

Use high-quality, free stock images from sources like Unsplash and Pexels to supplement your image library

❌ GOOGLE IMAGES

✅ STOCK IMAGES
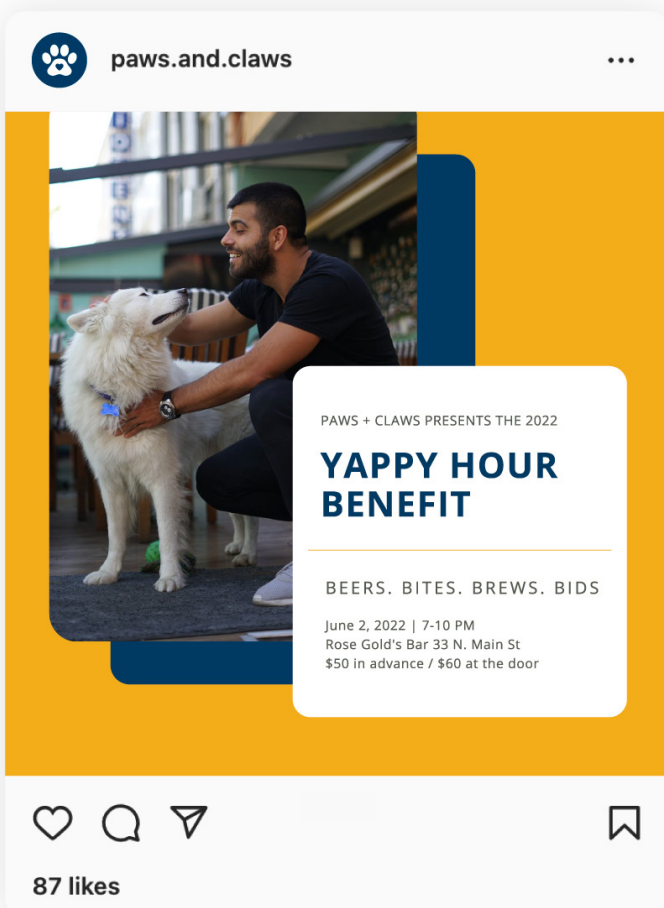
Designing a Social Post

[Americans spent an average of 1,300 hours on social media](#) in 2020. Out of 9,000 American and Canadian nonprofits surveyed, [67% do not have set policies](#), strategies, or goals for social media. With thoughtful planning, your nonprofit can stand out from the rest and reach your audience where they already spend about 15% of their day.

Create a strategy

Creating a social media calendar and strategy will help you stay organized, keep on top of trends, and stay personally engaged with your most loyal supporters. Add social media to your annual goal-setting routine, and consider what you'd like to accomplish and how you might get there. [Canva's free and thorough guide](#) to creating a social media strategy for your nonprofit will walk you through every step.

Take advantage of templates for quick, easy, eye-catching posts

Each social media platform you may want to use will have its own set of parameters, and the posts that succeed will differ between platforms too. [DonorPerfect offers some pre-built templates](#) you can personalize for Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube, and more.

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BEERS. BITES. BREWS. BIDS

June 2, 2022 | 7-10 PM
Rose Gold's Bar 33 N. Main St
$50 in advance / $60 at the door

87 likes

caption:

you're invited to **[ORG NAME'S] [EVENT NAME]** on **[MONTH, DAY, YEAR]** from **[START TIME]** to **[END TIME]** at **[PLACE]**. Featuring **[SOMETHING GOOD]**, **[SOMETHING FUN]**, and **[SOMETHING AWESOME]**, this event is a can't miss! Buy your tickets at the link in our bio! Proceeds will help us at **[YOUR MISSION]**. We hope to see you there!

Grab and hold on to your audience's attention

Take advantage of the "social" in social media, and create posts that invite your followers to interact with you. No donor enjoys feeling like an ATM, and personal engagement outside of solicitations is crucial in [developing donor relationships that last](#). Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Use polling features to learn more about your audience and what interests them about your nonprofit

- Host an AMA (Ask Me Anything) with your executive director or a staff member who's working on a particularly exciting project, and solicit questions from your donors ahead of time

- Post a quick video to show your supporters what a "day in the life" looks like at your nonprofit

- Celebrate and thank your volunteers with photos of them in action

PRO TIP

" Don't forget your brand guidelines when it comes to the look and feel of your social media posts. Since many social media posts include photography, your brand guidelines can include your approach to photography too. In an ideal world, the same photographer would shoot all of your photos with a defined perspective and color palette, but this is rare!

One way designers work to bring consistency to photography provided by multiple sources is through colorization. Products like Canva allow you to apply color effects like color overlays or a black and white effect to your images. Select how you will colorize your images and stay consistent throughout your posts!
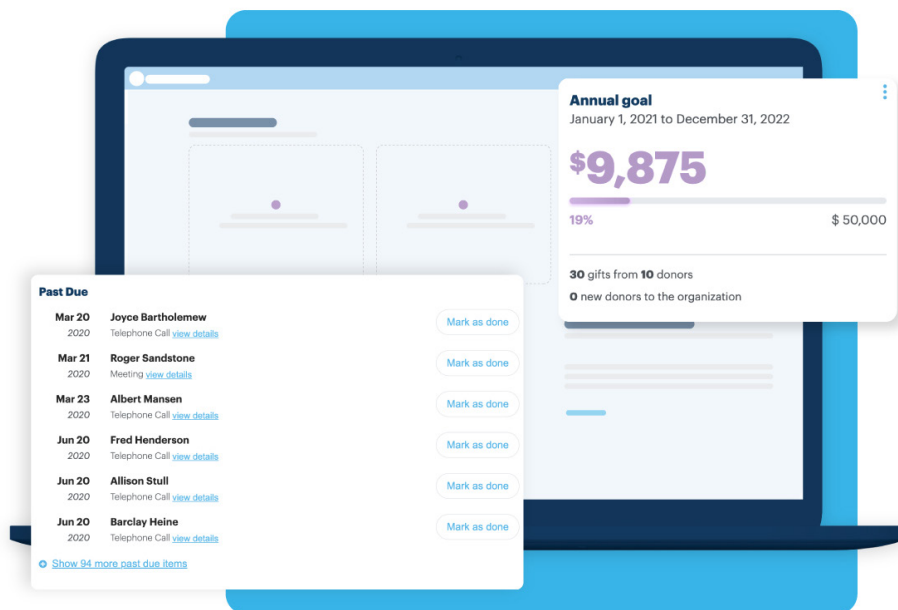
- Abby Guido, Abby Ryan Design

Tools and templates that play well with DonorPerfect

- Constant Contact - Email Builder

- Give Cloud - Website Builder

- DonorPerfect Online Forms - Form Builder

- Slides Carnival - Presentations

- Biteable - Animations

- Desygner & Canva - Graphics Builders

Design your fundraising strategy with DonorPerfect

Annual goal
January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2022

$9,875

19% $ 50,000

30 gifts from **10** donors
0 new donors to the organization

Past Due

Mar 20 2020	Joyce Bartholemew	Telephone Call view details	Mark as done
Mar 21 2020	Roger Sandstone	Meeting view details	Mark as done
Mar 23 2020	Albert Mansen	Telephone Call view details	Mark as done
Jun 20 2020	Fred Henderson	Telephone Call view details	Mark as done
Jun 20 2020	Allison Stull	Telephone Call view details	Mark as done
Jun 20 2020	Barclay Heine	Telephone Call view details	Mark as done

Show 94 more past due items

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