

Retention Guide

31 Strategies to Optimize
Retention Across Channels

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Introduction

Is generosity on the rise? The latest giving trends suggest fundraisers have *reason to be hopeful* in the year ahead.

Overall, more dollars are being donated, with GivingTuesday 2025 setting a new record—nearly \$4 billion raised in a single day, a 13% increase over the previous year. Participation also grew, with more people giving, volunteering, and engaging with causes they care about.

But beneath these positive headlines lies a more complex reality. While generosity is strong, many nonprofits continue to face pressure from rising costs, increased demand for services, and ongoing competition for donor attention. More dollars alone don't guarantee long-term stability.

That's why retention remains critical. Sustainable growth depends not just on inspiring people to give once, but on building lasting relationships that encourage donors to stay engaged over time. Retaining donors must be a priority across all fundraising channels.

AGP offers actionable, omni-channel strategies to help nonprofit fundraisers and leaders strengthen donor relationships, deepen engagement, and inspire long-term loyalty—so today's generosity becomes tomorrow's sustained support.



SECTION 1

Retention Is Essential to the Fundraising Lifecycle

Your ability to retain donors makes the difference between a *thriving nonprofit* and one that is *constantly seeking new support*.

The average donor retention rate hovers around 45%, meaning more than half of donors give once and never return. Simply put, you'll have to replace 55% of your donors each year. That task grows exponentially more difficult as you compete with other organizations that have similar missions and goals as you do.

Poor retention is also expensive — you'll spend five times more to acquire a new donor than to retain an existing one. That's a significant commitment of money, time, and resources you could otherwise devote to stewarding existing donors and investing in programs.

While retention can be a tricky puzzle to solve, it's well worth the effort. Retained donors typically give two to three times more over their lifetime than one-time donors. With a legion of sustained support in your corner, you can focus on connecting with your audience and expanding the impact of your mission.

SECTION 2

It All Starts with Donor Relationships

If the word “retention” brings to mind “recurring giving,” you’re only halfway there. An effective retention strategy is *rooted in strong donor relationships*.

Enrolling someone in monthly giving isn’t enough — a “set it and forget it” mindset will only work for so long. You must continue to give donors a reason to support you. The ones most likely to form a lasting relationship are those whose values align with your cause.

HOW DO YOU FIND THESE DONORS? HINT: YOU ALREADY KNOW THEM.

Analyzing your donor behavior data can help you separate one-time givers from those with potential staying power so you can build meaningful relationships. Here are some practical data strategies you can use on any channel to encourage retention:

- ▶ **Look at previous donations and performance metrics to infer the motivation behind someone’s support.** You’ll also uncover patterns regarding when, how often, and how much they give so you can engage them at the best times.
- ▶ **At a minimum, use data to personalize communications and appeals.** Address a donor by name, share the impact of their past gifts, and offer updates on programs that interest them.



- ▶ **Use data to identify donors less likely to donate again, such as those who give to a specific event or drive.** Follow up to keep the donor engaged in the short term, sharing how their gift helped you meet your goal. Then, reach out a few days later with a compelling story of how the funds will be used.
- ▶ **Analyze previous fundraising campaigns to learn which appeals resonate most with various audiences.** Use the data on content, images, buttons, subject lines — anything you can measure — to develop more effective campaigns.
- ▶ **Segment your audience based on shared traits or characteristics. This could include the donation amount, the year they started giving, or the program they support.** Not only can you then create more relevant messages, but you can also tailor retention plans that will keep them engaged.

Another must: The system you use to collect your data should be organized and easy to understand. It should also track various metrics to help you determine what's working and where to invest your time and effort. For instance:

- ▶ **First-Time Donor Conversion Rate:** How many donors made a second donation in the same year?
- ▶ **Donor Renewal Rate:** How many donors gave again the following year?
- ▶ **Multi-Year Retention Rate:** Of donors who made their first gift 3–5 years ago, how many have given again or dropped off?
- ▶ **Donor Lifetime Value:** How much does the average donor give, how often, and for how long?

The data you collect is only as good as your database.

Ensure your customer relationship management (CRM) platform integrates with other systems, such as donation software and social listening tools, to visualize a donor's complete journey with your nonprofit.

31 Strategies to Optimize Retention

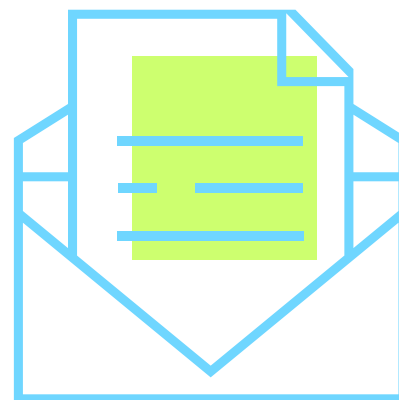
While some retention strategies are universal, others are most effective for specific channels. *If you're using an omni-channel approach to reach donors — and we hope you are — you'll want to prioritize retention on each platform.*

We've gathered the top tactics to help you develop lasting relationships with donors regardless of how and where you engage with them. These expert tips are organized by channel so you can optimize your resources for maximum impact.

Direct Mail

Despite growth in digital fundraising, direct mail continues to be an impactful way to reach and retain donors. Letters and postcards are a tactile way for patrons to interact with and support your organization. Try these retention best practices:

- 1. Focus on personalization.** Address donors by name, refer to their most recent gift, and share the real-world impact they made. Less “we did this” and more “you did this” so they understand exactly how their donation was used.
- 2. Say thank you.** After each donation, send a prompt, personalized thank-you note expressing your gratitude. Don't ask for a second gift just yet; the purpose is to show your appreciation.
- 3. Customize imagery and copy.** Use data to uncover the specific programs that resonate most with each donor and tailor the mail piece accordingly. For instance, if someone donates to your animal shelter to help more dogs get adopted, include photos of the pooches with their new pet parents.

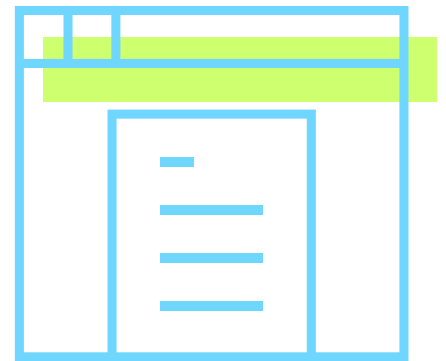


4. **Segment recipients.** Save resources by sending pieces to those who are more likely to prefer direct mail. Research shows this includes donors over age 65, those who give less than \$100, and those who earn under \$40,000.
5. **Provide regular updates.** Direct mail isn't only for thank-you notes. Send regular communications to keep donors informed. You might start a monthly or quarterly newsletter to showcase how you've been using their precious dollars.

Email

Email is still one of a fundraiser's best tools, but you must use it mindfully. Your message is just one in an inbox of many, so standing out is critical. Whether you send thanks or a program update, your communication should bring value to the reader. Try these tips to ensure your email gets opened every time:

6. **Create targeted, customized campaigns.** Rather than casting a wide net, develop emails based on previous donations, interests, and preferences. This will ensure the message is relevant.
7. **Segment by donation history.** Sending separate messages to first-time, repeat, and major donors recognizes their past donations and encourages additional giving at a level that makes sense for them.
8. **Be consistent.** Establish an email cadence and stick with it. Regular communication helps donors maintain a connection with your mission. They'll come to expect your message and feel more looped into your work.
9. **Focus on the individual.** Not the donor, but the individual you serve. Tell the story of a single beneficiary to help patrons feel more invested in your organization and work. Use this story to underscore the difference recurring gifts can make.
10. **Keep the message simple.** An eye-catching image, concise copy, and a clear call to action get straight to the point. Donors will appreciate that you respect their time and don't want to overwhelm them.
11. **Take advantage of transaction emails.** Did you know donation receipts, registration confirmations, and shipment tracking emails have the highest open rates (30–40%)? Use these to give donors a memorable message or inspiring next step so their journey becomes a cycle, not a dead end.



Text Messages

Texts have a 98% open rate, so be sure your fundraising strategy includes SMS. This is an opportunity to reach your audience instantly. But again, mindfulness is essential. Too many texts that only ask for money will quickly move donors to unsubscribe. These text-related best practices can help you keep donors engaged:

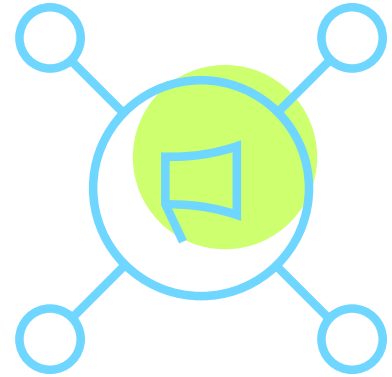
- 12. Create a dialogue.** Don't just text when you need a donation. Send reports from the field and other deliberate, relevant messages to start and carry on a conversation.
- 13. Share valuable information.** Form partnerships with area businesses or organizations and share info on local happenings. Donors will view you as a trusted source in the community and gain value from your texts.
- 14. Offer text fundraising.** Make it easy for donors to give via text, such as through a link to a mobile-friendly form. You can also provide a keyword donors can text to give to a specific campaign.
- 15. Provide an immediate thank you.** Once a gift is received, send the donor an instant thank-you text message. This immediate acknowledgment should also include a testimonial of their real-world impact.
- 16. Share other opportunities for involvement.** Use text messages to promote upcoming events or volunteer opportunities, showing that you value the donor beyond their monetary gift. You'll also give them a chance to see your mission in action.



Social Media

An omni-channel approach meets donors where they are and must include organic social media. Don't worry; you don't have to be on every channel. Use data to determine which platforms your donors use most often, then put these retention best practices in place:

- 17. Connect through storytelling.** Social media images and videos offer an incredible way to showcase donor impact. Prioritize genuine, real-life content over professionally produced media.
- 18. Collect feedback.** Allowing donors to share input can strengthen their bond with your nonprofit. Social media platforms make it easy to create surveys or polls. You'll also learn more about your donors in the process, making it easier for you to then target them with relevant posts.
- 19. Build on post-event momentum.** One-time donors often come to your organization through a special event. Keep them engaged by sharing photos and including an easy way for them to donate again.
- 20. Turn donors into advocates.** Ice bucket challenge, anyone? Compelling testimonials or entertaining challenges will encourage followers to share your posts. Consider finding a corporate partner to sponsor a "give-a-dollar-for-every-share" campaign.
- 21. Be transparent.** Answer audience questions live on Facebook, Instagram, or X. This gives supporters an opportunity to get to know you and see how their donations are being used.



Digital Ads

A paid digital strategy can include everything from social media and Google ads to connected TV spots. The beauty of this fundraising channel is that it enables precise targeting — and can be more affordable than you think. Digital ads are an exceptional way to keep donors connected to your organization. The following best practices will help:

- 22. Clean up your data.** High-quality donor data enables you to create a more effective retention strategy. When you know who you're talking to, how much they've given, and how they've engaged with your nonprofit, you can customize more relevant ads that inspire action.
- 23. Retarget donors.** Display ads to previous donors through retargeting to remind them of their past support. Personalize the ad to show the difference their first donation made and how they can have a more significant impact through recurring giving.
- 24. Use your donor list.** Trying to reach everyone with your digital ads will only waste money. Be more intentional by uploading your donor list to your social media or online advertising platform. Then, you can target your audience with relevant content.
- 25. Segment your list.** Again, the more personal your ads, the more they'll resonate. Group donors by donation amount or engagement activity, then target them with ads tailored to reflect their experience with your organization.
- 26. Save ads for the greatest need.** If everything is urgent, then nothing is. Bombarding your audience with ads will only turn them off. Instead, reserve ads for critical giving campaigns — especially if your budget is small — so donors know the need is genuine.



Website

More than 60% of donors prefer to give online, meaning your website is critical to your fundraising strategy. It offers multiple ways to showcase your impact, outline giving opportunities, and promote events. With these tips, it can also drive retention:

- 27. Deliver an outstanding user experience.** Your online donation process should be as smooth as possible. Remove any friction or barriers that may overcomplicate the process or frustrate users to the point of abandonment. Also, offer flexible payment options.
- 28. Optimize your site for mobile.** More than half of nonprofit website traffic comes from mobile devices. Ensure your site translates perfectly to a phone or tablet for a consistent giving experience on any device.
- 29. Promote recurring giving.** On your donation form or pages, offer donors the option to upgrade to a recurring giving program. In clear, concise terms, illustrate how they can double or triple their impact.
- 30. Get creative with your thank you.** Your website is the perfect place to recognize donors. Display donor names prominently on a virtual “donor wall,” spotlight a donor of the month, or create an interactive feature sharing real-time impact updates.
- 31. Add a survey.** Use a survey or poll to learn more about the donor. This can help you uncover their giving priorities, the causes they support, and how often they want to hear from you. Ultimately, donors want to know they matter.





SECTION 4

Let's Create Your Retention Plan

There you have it — **31 ways you can start retaining more donors today!** *With these tips in your back pocket, you'll build deeper connections with your supporters across all your fundraising channels.* **Even better, a next-level retention strategy will boost revenue, donor loyalty, and long-term security for your mission.**

The experts at AGP can help you understand what makes your donors tick and create a retention strategy that delivers relevant messaging, celebrates their gifts, and inspires lifelong support. Moreover, our proprietary data platform, [GivingDNA](#), is an all-in-one tool for analyzing and visualizing your data to uncover your donors' full giving potential.

To further your retention efforts, we encourage you to download our newly updated eBook, "[Relationship Fundraising](#)." This powerful resource will help you develop meaningful connections with all your donors to grow a community of dedicated patrons who will support you for years to come.

Contact Us Today!

Visit teamallegiance.com/contact-us
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MORE ABOUT AGP

Turning Missions Into Movements

At AGP, we help nonprofits turn *missions into movements* — and *supporters into passionate champions*.

We're a strategic partner to mission-driven teams who want more than short-term wins. Our work blends insight and creativity to strengthen what matters most: deeper connection, lasting loyalty, and the resources to power your mission.

We've walked in your shoes. We understand the complexity nonprofits face—because we've lived it. That experience grounds our approach in authenticity, humility, and deep respect for your work.

From donor journeys to brand storytelling, direct mail to digital engagement, and data to design—we bring both intelligence and heart to help you grow what matters.

Whether you're looking to inspire action, modernize your strategy, or simply cut through the noise—we will meet you where you are and build from there.

This isn't just fundraising. It's not just marketing.

It's how powerful missions take root, gain momentum, and grow.

Choose AGP for Strategy & Consulting, Direct Mail, Web Design & Development, Digital Marketing, Advocacy, Membership Acquisition & Retention, Donation Platforms, Loyalty Programs, and more. Our clients feed the hungry, heal the sick, nourish souls, enrich lives, care for animals, and build minds. You have an important goal, and we're thrilled to leverage our blend of data, technology, and award-winning creative to get you there.



Contact Us

We'd love to connect *to learn more about your mission and the goals we can help you achieve.*

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