
2016 Nonprofit Communications Trends Report



What's Inside . . .

WHEN AND WHERE NONPROFITS WILL COMMUNICATE

- Which **nonprofit communications goals** are most important, and how that varies based on your job title. See page 5.
- New data on what's associated with a **greater feeling of responsibility** for fundraising and community engagement goals. See page 8.
- Which **communications channels are most important** to nonprofits, and how often they plan to send appeals and newsletters via both print and email. Starts on page 10.
- Which **social media sites nonprofits favor**, including new data on how often they will update each social media channel. See page 15.

GETTING THE WORK DONE

- **What gets in the way** of nonprofit communications success (see page 18) and what communications teams say they **need to be more successful** (see page 19).
- What **excites** nonprofit communicators (see page 20) and what **worries** them (see page 22) about 2016.

NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS TEAMS

- The average **size of nonprofit communications teams**. See page 24.
- How **team structure and job satisfaction** may be related. See page 25.

NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

- The expected rate of communications **staff turnover**. See page 26.
- Communications director and coordinator **salaries** (see page 27), as well as **confidence and experience** on the job (page 28).

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORS

- The **importance of a strong relationship with the executive director** in a communications director's job satisfaction and retention. See page 29.
- Which **problems executive directors should focus on** to strengthen the relationship with their communications staff. See page 30.
- **Advice for executive directors** from Kivi Leroux Miller on how to work more effectively with communications teams. See page 31.

Tweetable Findings

Will your nonprofit communications staff leave in the next two years? It's 50-50. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

The average annual salary for nonprofit communications director is \$59,558; Comm coordinator: \$37,271. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

"Very Satisfied" nonprofit comm staff: 53% work on integrated teams; 19% on separate but equal teams. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

47% of nonprofit communicators plan to make nonprofit marketing and communications their career. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

Only 40% of communications directors describe the working relationship with their ED as excellent. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

Top goals for nonprofit communication directors in 2016: brand awareness & engaging community #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube remain the Top Three social media sites for nonprofits. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

The importance of Instagram to nonprofits has risen faster than any other social media site. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

59% of nonprofits will pay for Facebook advertising in 2016 with 39% spending over \$100. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

21% of nonprofits will post to Facebook multiple times a day; 31% will post once a day. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

Communications directors more heavily favor Twitter than EDs and development directors. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

Too many interruptions was a serious problem for 27% of comm directors; only 19% of dev directors. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

Recipe for nonprofit comm success? More dedicated staff, bigger budgets and more internal cooperation. #npcomm2016 <http://nmpg.us/2016>

#npcomm2016
<http://nmpg.us/2016>



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About the Survey & Report

This report is based on an online survey by NonprofitMarketingGuide.com during November 2015. The survey was administered using SurveyMonkey.com, with additional statistical analysis by MarketSight.com.

The full survey was completed by 1,613 nonprofits.

88% are in the United States (representing all 50 states/DC), 8% are in Canada, and the remainder are from 30 countries around the world.

47% have annual budgets under \$1 million; 53% have budgets over \$1 million. The biggest cohort is organizations with budgets in the \$1-5 million range.

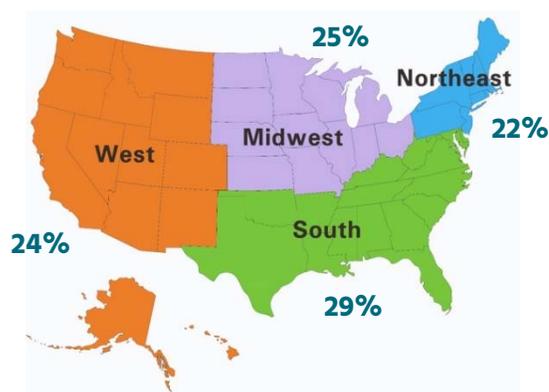
Participants represent the diverse mission areas of the nonprofit sector: 25% are in Human Services, Housing, Food, Jobs; 14% are in Education; 10% are in Health, Disease, Medical Research; and 9% are in Environment and Animals.

A small subset of questions was answered only by people who identified themselves as either “Communications or Marketing - Directors or Managers” or “Communications or Marketing - Coordinators or Associates.”

Use This Research to Start Conversations in Your Organization

Many nonprofits use this report to compare themselves against what’s “normal.” Some find comfort in the data. Others use it to start sometimes difficult discussions among staff and leadership about how to improve their communications. That’s how we recommend you use it!

Nonprofits from all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia participated in this year’s trends survey.



You’ll find suggested discussion questions in quote bubbles like this one.

Communications Goals & Responsibilities

Goals vary greatly between communications directors, development directors, and executive directors.

The top three goals selected by nonprofit staff vary depending on job title.

Not surprisingly, communications directors lean more toward Community Engagement and Brand Awareness, while development directors lean more toward Donor Acquisition and Retention. Executive directors fall somewhere in the middle.

The relative ranking of these goals has changed little in the six years we have produced this report, with one exception: **Donor Retention has been rising as a goal across the board, but especially among communications directors and executive directors.**

Top Goals for Communications Directors



How can you tweak your 2016 communications strategy to better align your specific donor retention and broader community engagement goals?

Top Goals for Development Directors



Top Goals for Executive Directors



Relative Importance of Goals by Job Title, 2014-2016

Brand Awareness	2014	2015	2016
Communications Directors	45%	68%	61%
Executive Directors	34%	42%	36%
Development Directors	34%	25%	32%
Acquiring Donors	2014	2015	2016
Communications Directors	41%	33%	47%
Executive Directors	68%	54%	73%
Development Directors	74%	89%	79%
Retaining Donors	2014	2015	2016
Communications Directors	16%	36%	45%
Executive Directors	34%	60%	68%
Development Directors	64%	94%	85%
Engaging Community	2014	2015	2016
Communications Directors	48%	65%	59%
Executive Directors	44%	51%	49%
Development Directors	47%	39%	47%
Thought Leadership	2014	2015	2016
Communications Directors	30%	40%	31%
Executive Directors	20%	34%	11%
Development Directors	9%	16%	10%

Percentage placing the goal in their Top 3

Who Feels Responsible for Fundraising and Community Engagement

Our research shows that nonprofit communication directors and coordinators feel primarily responsible for engaging their communities and general brand awareness. Acquiring and retaining donors are secondary goals. 94% feel directly or somewhat responsible for community building and engagement goals. But only 43% feel directly or somewhat responsible for fundraising goals.

Exactly where responsibility for both fundraising and building/engaging your community lies is less important than ensuring that *someone* feels directly responsible for these important goals. In too many nonprofits, the focus is simply on *doing* day after day, rather than on being thoughtful and strategic and working toward clearly defined goals.

INTEGRATED TEAMS = MORE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Our research shows a correlation between the **structure of communications and fundraising teams and how responsible individuals personally feel** for achieving both fundraising and community engagement goals.

Nonprofit staff on **integrated teams where marketing and fundraising staff work together** on an equal level under the same manager were **four times as likely to say they felt directly responsible** for fundraising goals as those working on separate teams with different managers. Members of integrated teams were **twice as likely to feel responsible for community building and engagement goals.**

DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY = HIGHER JOB SATISFACTION

Our research also shows a correlation between **feeling directly responsible for goals and feeling “very satisfied” with the work.**

Of Those Who Are Very Satisfied in Their Current Positions . . .	
31%	Directly responsible for fundraising goals
27%	Somewhat responsible for fundraising goals
22%	Not responsible for fundraising goals
30%	Directly responsible for community engagement
25%	Somewhat responsible for community engagement
20%	Not responsible for community engagement

Are You Directly Responsible for Meeting Annual Fundraising Goals?



- Yes, meeting specific annual fundraising goals is one of my responsibilities.
- Somewhat. I am on a fundraising team, or fundraising is a broad goal, but I am not personally accountable for reaching a specific fundraising goal.
- No, meeting specific annual fundraising goals is not one of my responsibilities.

Are You Directly Responsible for Meeting Community Building and Engagement Goals?



- Yes, meeting specific community building and engagement goals is one of my responsibilities.
- Somewhat. I am on a marketing team, or community engagement is a broad goal, but I am not personally accountable for reaching a specific community building or engagement goal.
- No, meeting specific community building and engagement goals is not one of my responsibilities.

The “Big Six” Channels

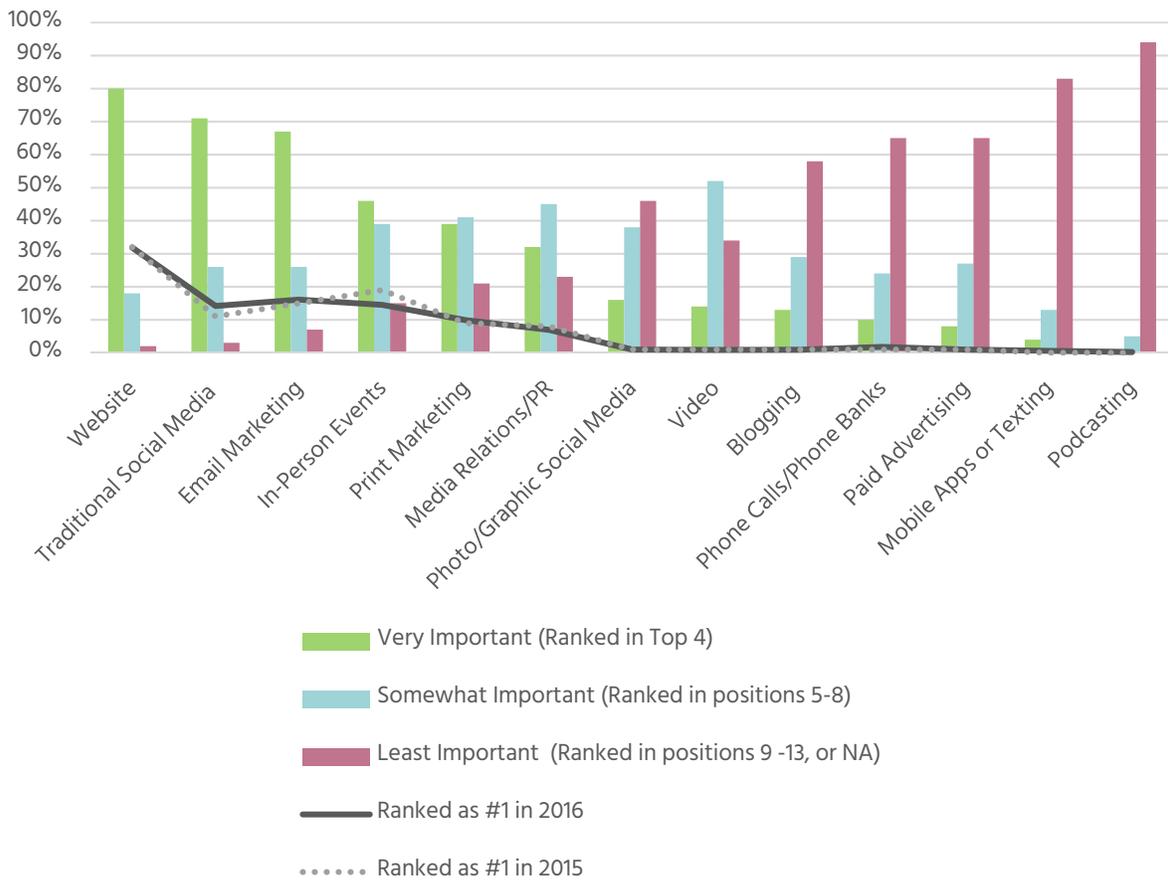
The six primary communications channels used by nonprofits – websites, email, traditional social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), in-person events, print marketing, and media relations/PR – **won’t change in 2016.**

But there will be more emphasis on visual content. Visual social media (such as Instagram and Pinterest) and video (including YouTube) moved up in priority again this year, surpassing blogging and phone banking for the first time ever.

Staff with direct responsibility for fundraising have a stronger preference for phone calls/phone banks, mobile apps/texting, in-person events and print marketing than those without direct responsibility.

Staff with direct responsibility for community building and engagement have a stronger preference for media relations/PR than those who do not have direct responsibility.

Ranking of Communications Channels by Nonprofits



Direct Mail Appeals

In 2016, about a third of nonprofits will send direct mail appeals at least quarterly, a third will send appeals twice a year, and 13% will not send direct mail appeals at all.

Frequency of Direct Mail Appeals



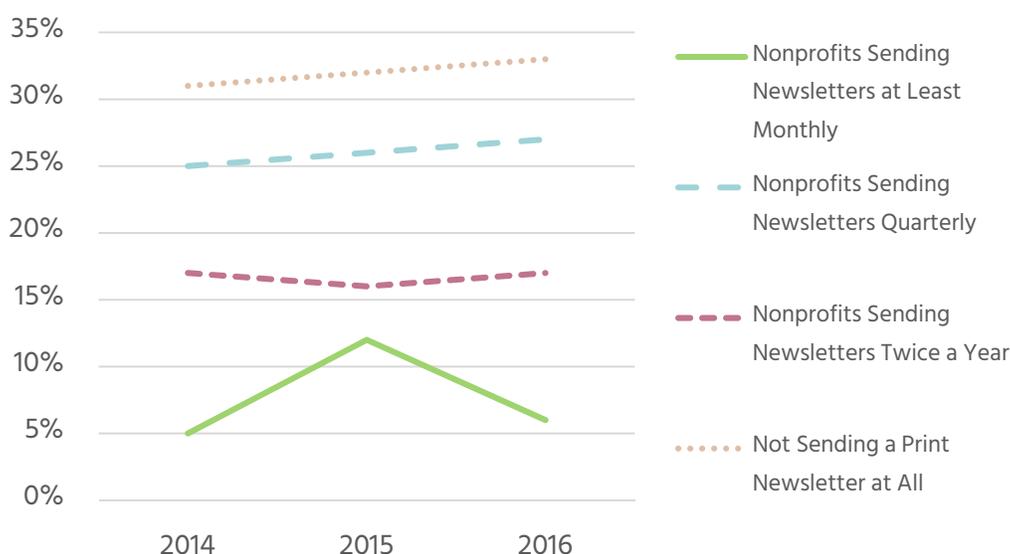
How often will your nonprofit send a **DIRECT MAIL APPEAL** (fundraising or other direct call to action) to the typical person on your print mailing list in 2016?

Several times a week	0%
Weekly	1%
Every other week	1%
Monthly (12x/year)	5%
Every other month (6x/year)	7%
Quarterly (4x/year)	20%
Twice a year	33%
Once a year	16%
Don't know	5%
Will not send any direct mail appeals	13%

Direct Mail Newsletters

In 2016, about two-thirds of nonprofits will send a print newsletter, with one-third not sending one at all. Among the nonprofits that will send print newsletters, quarterly is the most popular frequency.

Frequency of Print Newsletters



How often will your nonprofit send a **DIRECT MAIL NEWSLETTER** (or other informational update) to the typical person on your print mailing list in 2016?

Several times a week	0%
Weekly	1%
Every other week	0%
Monthly (12x/year)	5%
Every other month (6x/year)	4%
Quarterly (4x/year)	27%
Twice a year	17%
Once a year	9%
Don't know	4%
Will not send a print newsletter	33%

Should we drop our print newsletter?

It's a question we hear a lot at Nonprofit Marketing Guide.

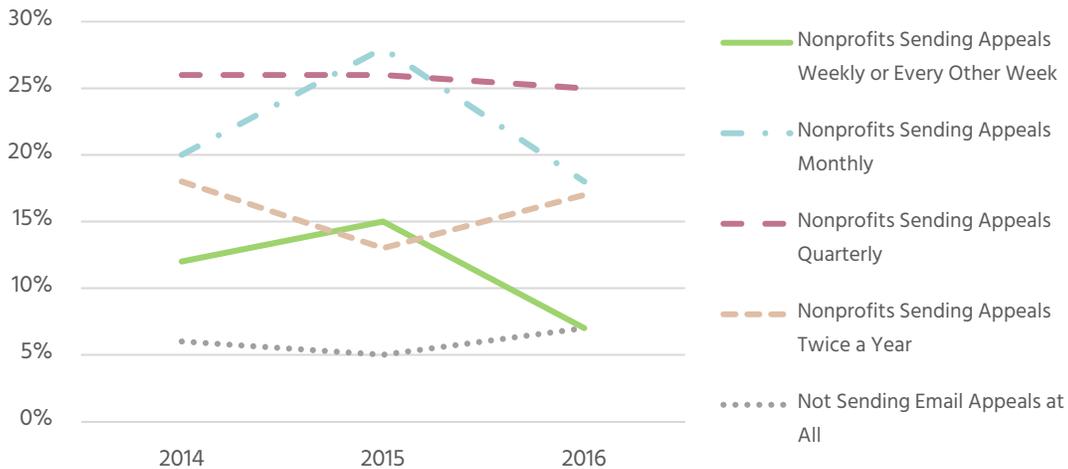
If you rely heavily on direct mail fundraising from individuals, we suggest you do a print newsletter at least quarterly, and perhaps even more often. A well-done, donor-centered newsletter can be a great source of revenue on its own, in addition to fundraising from appeal letters.

If you don't do a lot of direct mail fundraising, consider the pros and cons of the format. Is there a specific goal that a print newsletter could help you reach that justifies the additional time and expense of printing and mailing?

Email Appeals

In last year’s report, we saw a jump in email appeal frequency. This year that spike has returned to the patterns we saw in previous years. In 2016, 25% of nonprofits will send four email appeals a year, 13% will send six appeals a year, and 18% will send twelve appeals a year. Only 7% will not send any email appeals in 2016.

Frequency of Email Appeals



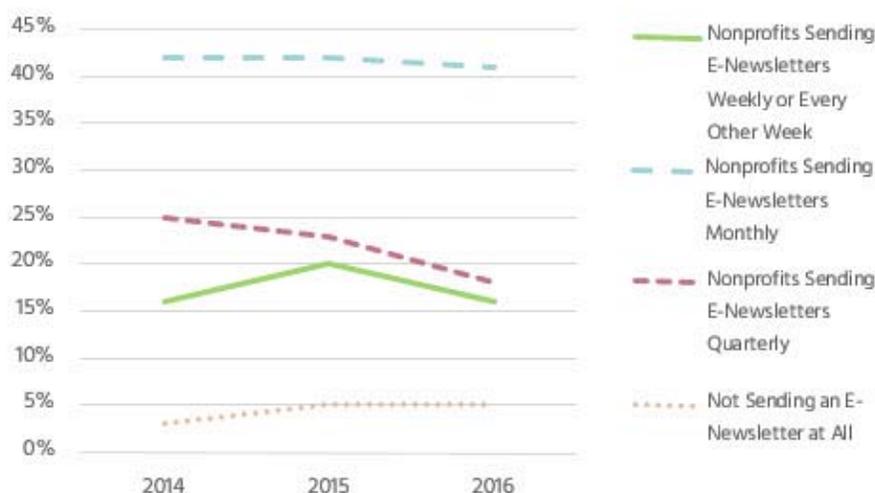
How often will your nonprofit send an **EMAIL APPEAL** (fundraising, advocacy, or other direct call to action) to the typical person on your email list in 2016?

Several times a week	1%
Weekly	3%
Every other week	3%
Monthly (12x/year)	18%
Every other month (6x/year)	13%
Quarterly (4x/year)	25%
Twice a year	17%
Once a year	5%
Don't know	7%
Will not send any email appeals	7%

Email Newsletters

Nonprofits are much bigger producers of email newsletters than print newsletters: 9 in 10 will send at least one e-newsletter, while only two-thirds of nonprofits will send a print newsletter. Monthly is the most popular frequency for e-newsletters.

Frequency of Email Newsletters



How often will your nonprofit send an **EMAIL NEWSLETTER** (or other informational update) to the typical person on your email list in 2016?

Several times a week	1%
Weekly	8%
Every other week	8%
Monthly (12x/year)	41%
Every other month (6x/year)	9%
Quarterly (4x/year)	18%
Twice a year	4%
Once a year	1%
Don't know	4%
Will not send an e-newsletter	5%

How often should we send our email newsletter?

At Nonprofit Marketing Guide, we generally advocate shorter newsletters, more often.

This is especially true for organizations sending newsletters less than monthly. If you are going to be recognized in the inbox, you need to appear there regularly, monthly at a minimum.

If you are already sending monthly newsletters, but find that they are too long, we suggest increasing your frequency to every other week or weekly, and sending less content in each edition.

Top Social Media Sites

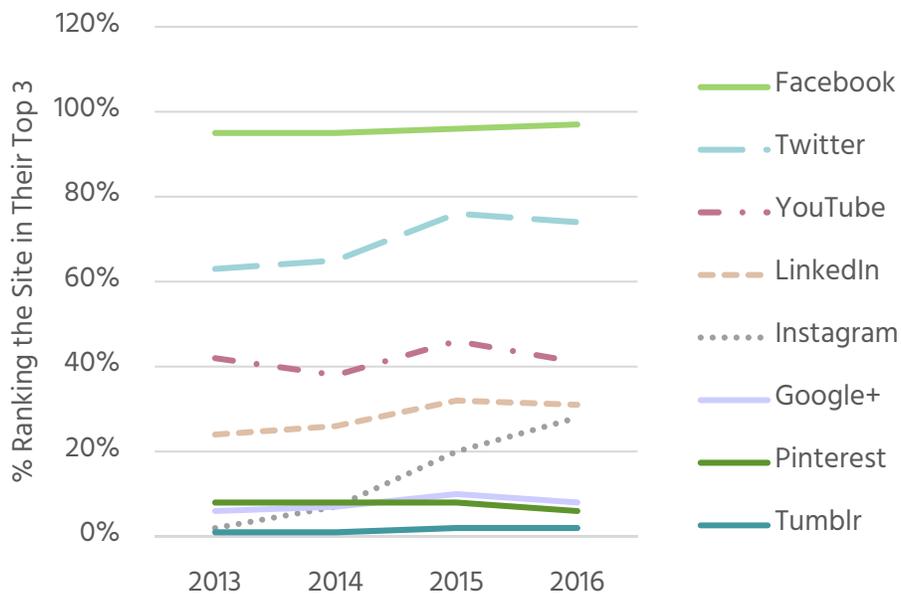
Nonprofits use multiple sites for community engagement

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube remain the Top Three social media sites for nonprofits.

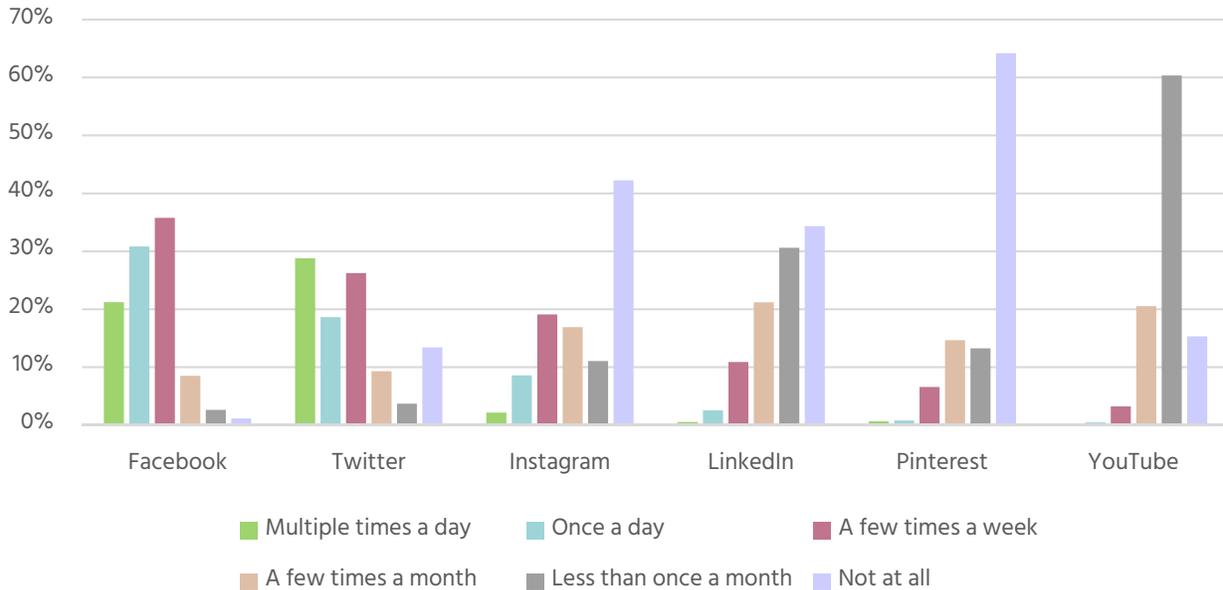
Instagram continues its steady rise in importance to nonprofits, while use of LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+ and Tumblr remains flat.

Nonprofits are most likely to experiment with Flickr and Periscope in 2016, confirming their interest in more visual content.

Top Social Media Sites for Nonprofits



Posting Frequency on Social Media



Nonprofits and Facebook

Facebook maintains complete dominance in the nonprofit sector as the top social media site. **Only 1% of nonprofits surveyed said they would not use Facebook at all in 2016.**

59% of nonprofits will pay for Facebook advertising.

21% of nonprofits will post to Facebook multiple times a day; 31% will post once a day; and 36% will post a few times a week. It’s worth noting that several expert sources recommend posting at least once a day, and ideally 3-4 times a day, for best engagement. Staff directly responsible for community engagement goals are much more likely to post multiple times a day than others.

How much do you expect your nonprofit to spend on **Facebook ads** in 2016?

Zero / No Paid Advertising	41%
Up to \$100	20%
Between \$100 - \$500	22%
Between \$501 - \$1,000	9%
Between \$1,001 - \$5,000	6%
Between \$5,001 - \$10,000	1%
More than \$10,000	1%

How could you use Facebook ads to better integrate your email and social media marketing?



Nonprofits and Twitter

Twitter maintains a firm hold on second place for favorite nonprofit social media channel, with one interesting twist: **Communications directors have a much stronger preference for Twitter** over executive directors and development directors.

86% of communications directors put Twitter in their Top 3 Social Channels, while only 73% of development directors and 63% of executive directors rated it that highly. 45% of communications directors with direct responsibility for community engagement will post multiple times a day, compared to only 20% of development directors with direct responsibility for fundraising.

Twitter beats Facebook across the board for multiple postings per day. 29% of nonprofits say they will post to Twitter that often, compared to 21% for Facebook. Another 19% of nonprofits will tweet once a day, with 26% posting a few times a week.

If you think of Twitter as the place for breaking news and real-time reporting and conversation, how could you best use it at your nonprofit?



Nonprofits and YouTube

Fundraising video anyone? **Development directors have the strongest preference for YouTube**, with 49% placing it in their Top 3 Social Channels. 42% of executive directors and 39% of communications directors put YouTube in their Top 3. However, communications directors are more likely to post videos more frequently than development directors.



Nonprofits and Instagram

Instagram continues its rapid ascent as a favorite social media channel among nonprofits, **growing faster as a favorite than any other channel**. 30% of communications directors and 29% of executive directors placed Instagram in their Top 3 Social Channels, followed by 24% of development directors.

What Gets in the Way

Time and resources are always in short supply. But what specifically frustrates nonprofit staff?

Top 5 Problems:

- Too many competing priorities
- Urgent tasks take precedence over important ones
- Too many interruptions during the work day
- Lack of coordination of co-workers
- Lack of clear processes and procedures

What can you do on your own, and what can your team do together, to reduce the severity of these problems?

It's a Bigger Deal to Communications Directors

While development directors and executive directors agree with these Top 5 problems, **communications directors feel more strongly about some of them.**

Urgent tasks taking precedence over important ones was a serious problem for 40% of communications directors, but only for 28% of development directors and 26% of executive directors.

Too many interruptions in the work day was a serious problem for 27% of communications directors, but only 19% of development directors rated it as serious.

Lack of coordination with co-workers was a serious problem for 14% of communications directors, but was identified as serious by only 8% of development directors and 4% of executive directors.

Lack of management direction is a bigger problem than excessive oversight for communications staff.

Lack of management direction

Moderate/Severe Problem: 40%

Not a Problem/Minor Problem: 60%

Excessive management oversight

Moderate/Severe Problem: 22%

Not a Problem/Minor Problem: 78%

See page 29 for much more detail on improving the working relationships between executive directors and communications directors.

What's Needed for Success

Our communications/marketing would be more successful if . . .

Here's how survey participants most often completed the sentence, with some examples in their own words.

We had more staff dedicated specifically to communications.

We had staff who only did communications.
We had more content creators.
I had administrative support.
We hired a f----- Marketing Director.

We had a bigger budget.

We had more staff and resources.
We had a set budget reserved for marketing.
We had a budget to try new things.

We cooperated more internally.

We were brought in earlier in planning.
We all worked in sync.
We could agree on consistent messaging.
We had support and trust from others in the organization.

We had a more focused strategy and clear plan.

We could plan ahead more.
We had clear, strategic goals.
We could focus on fewer, bigger goals.
We had a clear strategy for engagement and evaluation.

We could reach more people.

We had more contact with our community.
We had a stronger brand and messaging.
We could expand our network.
We were more interactive and conversational with our donors.

What can your nonprofit do to provide more of what staff say they need to be successful?

What **Excites** You about Your Work in 2016?

Here's how survey participants most often responded to that question, with some examples in their own words.

Engaging the community and making a difference

Working for an organization I believe in and know makes a difference in the world.

If I do my job well, I can directly impact the quality of life for many people.

Growing our community engagement with novel marketing strategies.

A growing organization and new opportunities

Trying new things, moving the organization forward.

Many exciting new projects and opportunities, great team in place.

The opportunity to try new things and expand how we tell our story.

Financial growth

Raising more money!

New opportunities, especially if grant funding comes in.

Bigger budget to help meet organizational goals.

Staff growth and training

New coworkers with fun ideas.

The opportunity for a new staff member after being a one-person team for more than 5 years.

It's getting SO MUCH easier thanks to all I've learned through great, affordable training!

Technology improvements

Using more inventive ways to reach/communicate with supporters.

Chance to build a new website/community platform.

New website!

Creating a strategic plan

A finalized strategic plan with goals spelled out. Finally doing some strategic communications planning.

We finally feel we have dealt with a backlog of tasks and are beginning to be able to plan more formally.

Creative content

We're getting better at gathering stories of impact from our community, and they're very compelling!

Being creative in our storytelling and messaging.

I'm excited to start exploring ways to integrate more infographics into our communications.

Reaching more donors

The potential to tell our story and bring in new donors and raise more money to allow for more important work to be done.

Rebuilding a base of donors and participants back to previous years' levels.

Incorporating millennials into our donor base.

What can your nonprofit do to capitalize on the excitement that staff feels about 2016?

What **Worries** You about Your Work in 2016?

Here's how survey participants most often responded to that question, with some examples in their own words.

Staff and training restrictions

Not having enough staff to follow through with some excellent ideas.

We're being asked to do a lot and we are a very small team.

That I don't know enough about marketing and grant writing.

Budget and financial restrictions

Lack of dedicated marketing budget makes it hard to plan.

There is never enough money in the budget to do the important projects.

Not meeting financial goals due to lack of a compelling fundraising priority.

Time constraints

Too many hats to wear and not enough time to do it all.

Not having enough time to do everything and having to put in extra unpaid hours.

Balancing the day to day whirlwind activities and strategic goals.

Competing priorities

Adding new projects while maintaining older priorities at a high level.

Difficulties in managing tasks/time/priorities with more and more online needs arising.

Competing forces and organizational white noise that buries the goals/objectives of our mission.

Lack of strategy or a plan

That leadership won't approve a new clearer and focused message and our communications will be messy and confusing.

Excessive oversight over minutiae and concurrent lack of timely and strategic direction from manager.

Not sticking to a strategy and being more reactive rather than proactive, leading to near-sighted view on long-term goals.

Organization integration and growth

Organizational program expansion without equal increase in communications capacity.

Changes in organization might prevent growth.

Rogue sales team who creates and manipulates materials and hurts brand.

Technology constraints

No plan for updating our outdated website.

Lack of support for digital communications.

Keeping up with fast-paced changes in the online world in terms of how people get their information and what drives them to make donations or get involved.

Burnout and unrealistic workload

I can't take a true vacation because I'm the only full-time communications person.

Burning out from not feeling like I can do anything well.

Too many plates the communications team is expected to keep spinning in the air.

What conversations can you have with your team, and what changes can you make, to minimize these worries?

Communications Staffing

As a nonprofit's budget grows, so does the size of its communications team.

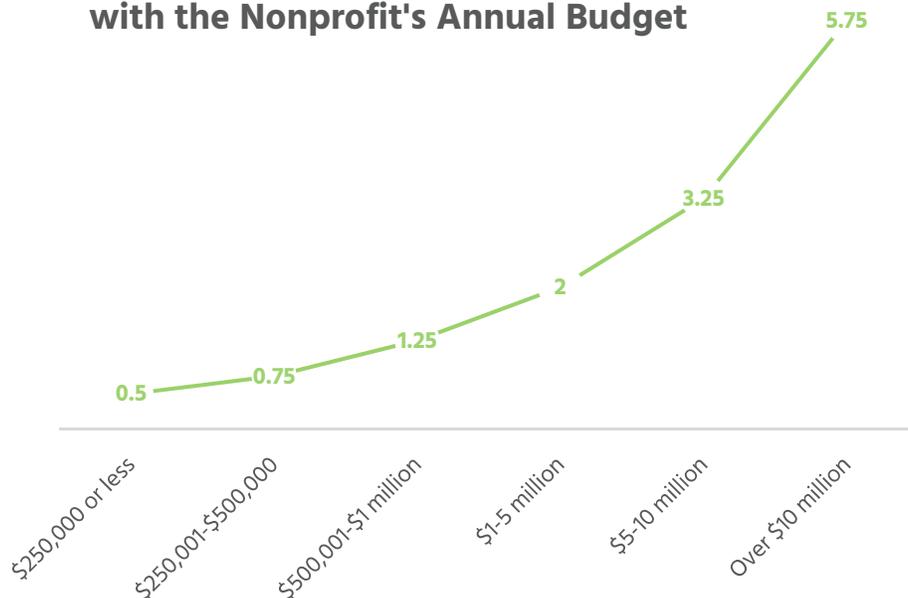
This year's research revealed the average staff size for communications teams, in full-time equivalents (FTE). Please note this is not the same as the ideal team size! We asked nonprofit communications directors to say in their own words what they needed to be more successful and the most popular responses were variations on "more staff time dedicated to communications."

Team size grows as budgets grow, surpassing one FTE somewhere between the \$500,000 – \$1 million mark and three FTE at the \$5 - 10 million mark.

In 2016, 72% of all survey participants said they expected their communications team's staffing to stay the same size, with only **20% expecting team staffing to grow.**

With respect to communications team budgets, 57% expect theirs to remain the same in 2016, with **28% expecting team budgets to grow.** (We did not ask about average budget size.)

FTE on the Communications Team Grows with the Nonprofit's Annual Budget



Integrated teams create more responsibility and job satisfaction

As communications staffing grows, questions about team structure and management often arise, especially in relationship to fundraising staff. In most nonprofits, communications and fundraising teams are on equal footing.

In 39% of nonprofits, you'll find an integrated team, with marketing and fundraising working together on an equal level under the same manager. **In 37% of nonprofits, you'll find separate marketing and fundraising teams** with different managers, but with equal authority within the organization.

While the percentage of "integrated" teams versus "separate but equal" teams is similar, we found some stark differences. As noted previously on page 8, **integrated teams are much more likely than separate-but-equal teams to feel direct responsibility for meeting both fundraising and community building/engagement goals.**

Job satisfaction is also significantly higher among staff on integrated teams.

Looking across all staff who say they are "very satisfied" in their positions, 53% work on integrated teams and 19% work on separate but equal teams.

Looking only at staff who work on integrated teams, 32% say they are "very satisfied," compared to 21% on separate but equal teams.

What about other management structures? In 11% of nonprofits a fundraising manager is in charge of marketing staff; in 3% of organizations, a marketing manager is in charge of fundraising staff. 11% of survey participants selected other structures, indicating that they do not fundraise, don't have any formal management structure, or one person does it all.

Staff Who Say They Are Satisfied in Their Current Positions Are More Likely to Work on Integrated Teams



Nonprofit Communications Staff on the Job

Nonprofit communicators – directors and coordinators – are committed to their work and passionate about their craft.

Nearly half (47%) plan to make nonprofit marketing and communications their career.

29% plan to stay in communications, but not necessarily at a nonprofit.

They are confident in their marketing and communications skills.

53% feel comfortable and 37% feel very capable in their jobs. In other words, 90% are confident in performing their job responsibilities.

They are experienced at the work.

Nonprofit communications directors have worked in the nonprofit sector for 10 years on average, and specifically in nonprofit communications and marketing for 7 years on average.

And they like their jobs!

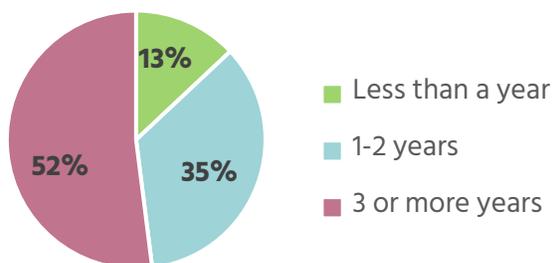
72% of communications staff are satisfied or very satisfied.

And yet, turnover is high.

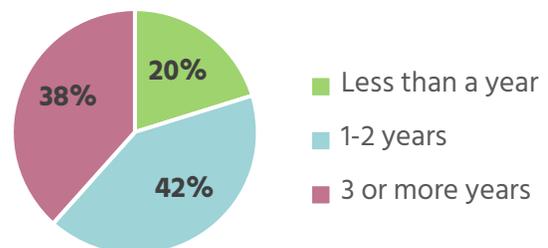
48% of communications directors and 61% of communications coordinators plan to leave their current position in the next two years. This is similar to the rate of departure for development directors, according to *Underdeveloped: A National Study of Challenges Facing Nonprofit Fundraising (January 2013)*.

WILL YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STAFF LEAVE IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS? IT'S 50-50.

48% of Communications Directors Plan to Leave Their Current Jobs with Two Years



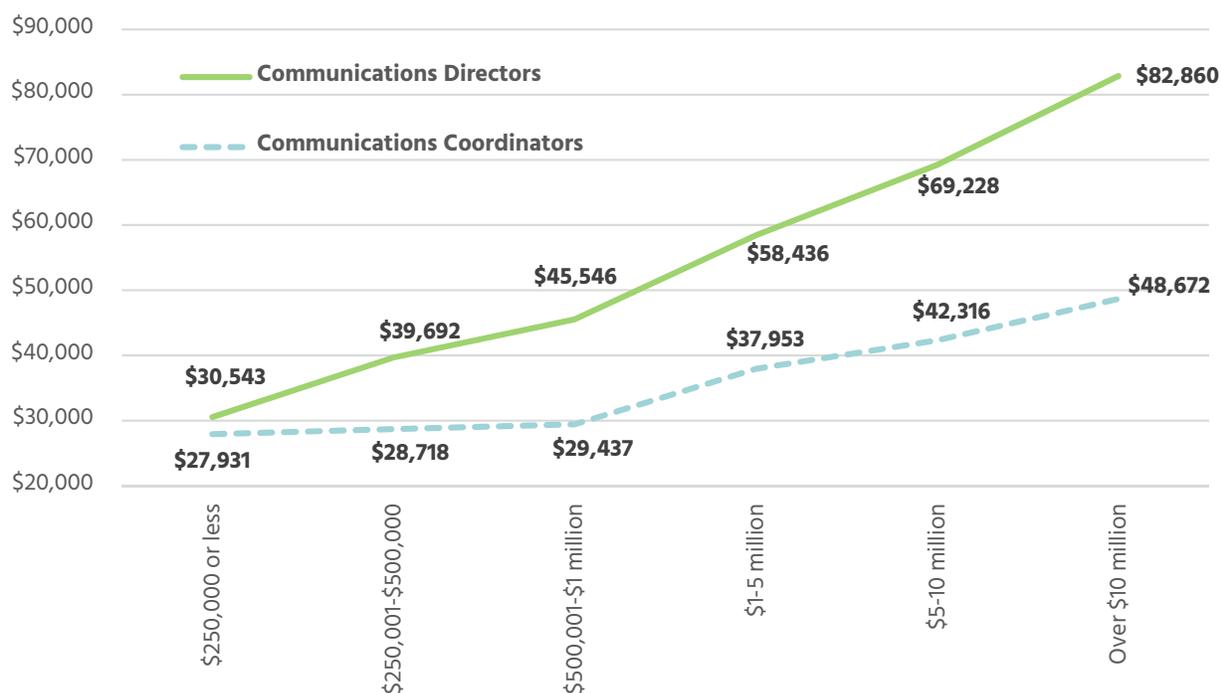
62% of Communications Coordinators Plan to Leave Their Current Jobs with Two Years



Communications Staff Salaries

This is the first year we have asked about salaries and years of experience on nonprofit communications teams. The average annual salary for a **communications coordinator** is **\$37,271**. The average annual salary for a **communications director** is **\$59,558**. As to be expected, salaries grow based on the overall budget size of the nonprofit.

Annual Salaries, Based on the Annual Budget Size of the Nonprofit



Some types of nonprofits tend to pay communications directors better . . .

Paying more than 20% above average:

- International
- Health, Disease, and Medical Research
- Other Public Benefit Research or Advocacy

... and some do worse.

Paying below average, by 10% or more

- Religion
- Arts, Culture and Humanities

Communications Staff Confidence and Experience

How They Feel About the Work and Their Own Skills	Communications Coordinators	Communications Directors
I am passionate about the work and plan to make nonprofit communications my career.	42%	49%
I plan to spend my career in communications, but not necessarily at a nonprofit.	34%	28%
I have a lot to learn and many knowledge and experience gaps to fill.	14%	8%
I am comfortable with most of the work, but want to keep getting better at it.	68%	48%
I am very capable, confident, and effective, and am looking to take my work and organization to the next level.	18%	44%

Type of Work Experience	Communications Coordinators	Communications Directors
Years employed at current nonprofit in any role	4 years	6 years
Years employed in current communications position	2 years	4 years
Total experience in communications at any employer (business, government, nonprofit)	8 years	13 years
Total experience in the nonprofit sector (all jobs, all nonprofits)	7 years	11 years
Total experience in nonprofit marketing or communications specifically	5 years	8 years

Data in these charts is from 678 survey participants who identified themselves as “Communications or Marketing – Director or Manager” (abbreviated to Communications Director) or “Communications or Marketing – Coordinator or Assistant” (abbreviated to Communications Coordinator). While not a perfect indicator, we use these job titles to distinguish between junior and senior communications positions.

Want to retain your communications director? Build an excellent working relationship.

Only 40% of communications directors describe the working relationship with their executive director as excellent.

- 45% say the relationship is “functional or fair”
- 8% say it is “difficult or strained”
- 3% say they do not have a working relationship with the executive director.



What Communications Directors Say	Excellent Relationship with Executive Director	Difficult Relationship with Executive Director
Plan to Leave Current Position . . .		
in Less Than a Year	4%	45%
in 5 or More Years	43%	7%
Very Satisfied or Satisfied in Current Position	92%	19%
Very Dissatisfied or Dissatisfied in Current Position	3%	50%
Plan to Stay in Nonprofit Communications as a Career	55%	31%
Communications Director is on Senior Management Team	59%	24%

Based on responses from 500+ nonprofit communications directors

Want to strengthen the relationship? Minimizing these problems can make a huge difference.

Take note of the major difference in how common problems are described by communications directors who label their relationships with their executive directors at either end of the spectrum: as either “excellent” or “difficult.”



What Communications Directors Say	Excellent Relationship with Executive Director	Difficult Relationship with Executive Director
Too Many Competing Priorities are ...		
not a problem at all	9%	5%
a serious problem.	37%	69%
Excessive Management Oversight is ...		
not a problem at all	69%	21%
a serious problem	4%	38%
Lack of Management Direction is ...		
not a problem at all	51%	10%
a serious problem	3%	45%
Wasteful Meetings are ...		
not a problem at all	43%	17%
a serious problem	5%	21%
Lack of Clear Process and Procedures is ...		
not a problem at all	29%	17%
a serious problem	7%	31%
Lack of Coordination with Co-Workers is ...		
not a problem at all	32%	5%
a serious problem	8%	38%

Based on responses from 500+ nonprofit communications directors

Tips for Executive Directors

Working More Effectively with Your Communications Team

In addition to what I've learned from six years of producing the *Nonprofit Communications Trends Report*, I've also trained and mentored hundreds of nonprofit communications directors over the last several years. I hear every day what works, and what doesn't.

Executive directors, here's what your communications staff would like you to know and do . . .

DEDICATE YOURSELF and REAL RESOURCES to COMMUNICATIONS

Dedicate real staff time to communications. Don't treat it as a "nice to have" option or make it a secondary part of someone else's job.

Put the communications director on the senior management team. They need to hear about what's happening in the organization earlier in the process, and to be included as program decisions are made.

Dedicate time to creative thinking and problem solving, for both staff and yourself. Communications is extremely dynamic and can't be put on autopilot. Everyone needs more time to think strategically, instead of doing, doing, doing all the time.

Dedicate yourself to understanding the basics. There are still many misconceptions about nonprofit marketing and communications. Educate yourself.

DEFINE THE WORK

Define the strategy. That means making choices and saying yes to just a few big goals, clear strategies, and smart tactics, and no to many, many more.

Define the priorities. Communications teams are besieged by too many priorities, and urgent tasks constantly overtaking important ones. Your leadership will make a huge difference here!

Define and limit the scope of the job to professional communications work. Don't dump all kinds of administrative or IT tasks on communications staff just because they are good with computers or tech savvy.

The 4 Ds of Effectively Managing Communications Teams

- **Dedicate** yourself and real resources to communications.
- **Define** the work.
- **Delegate** the work, including decisions.
- **Discuss** the work often.

DELEGATE THE WORK, INCLUDING DECISIONS

Delegate and empower staff to make communications decisions and to implement them. Be clear about what you are delegating fully, where you want to be consulted during the process, and where you want to make final decisions.

Minimize the hoops you make staff jump through. I coach nonprofit communicators on being CALM (Collaborative, Agile, Logical, and Methodical). Many times, they need to move fast – and to be agile – to take advantage of great marketing and public relations opportunities. But they are often stumble and miss those chances because of unreasonable constraints, real and perceived, placed on them by management.

As you delegate, allow staff to invest in professional development. Let them learn and then listen to them! Nonprofit communications, marketing, and fundraising staff have access to a great community of bloggers who share abundantly, in addition to paid professional development programs (including our All-Access Training Pass and Communications Director Mentoring Program at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com).

Unfortunately, I see executive directors ruin great work by staff all the time. It happens most often when an executive director's personal preferences (and often, ignorance of best practices) trump what's right for the real target of the communications.

Delegate control over communications staff's time and schedule to them as much as possible. Let them say No to you.

Communications staff are constantly pulled into meetings and asked to do work that is distracting from their priorities. Don't expect them to be "always on and available" to you, just because they might appear to be "always on" your communications channels with your community.

DISCUSS THE WORK OFTEN

Participate in regularly scheduled editorial meetings. The exact schedule will vary, but we have suggestions for quarterly, monthly, and weekly editorial meeting agendas on our blog.

Openly discuss ways to improve internal communications and cooperation between program, development, and communications staff. You can't have good external communications without good internal communications.

As we shared in this Trends Report, integrated communications/fundraising teams are likely to produce greater team responsibility for your goals, and more satisfaction on the job.

Everyone's busy, and this kind of coordination takes time. If your staff sees you investing your time into internal collaboration, so will they.

Make time for check-in discussions as campaigns are developed. Be a flexible sounding board. Even if you have delegated the work, don't wait until the last minute to add your comments. Executive directors have a way of derailing work or causing many late nights of work you don't even know are happening.

Want help building an excellent working relationship with your communications team? Contact us at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com.

Ready to take your communications to the next level?

The community of experts at Nonprofit Marketing Guide can help.

Daily blog, weekly e-newsletter, and helpful downloads. Free.

All-Access Training Pass with frequent webinars, feedback and fine-tuning sessions, Q & A panels, marketing time-savers, private Facebook community, and other exclusives. Pay monthly or annually.

Nonprofit Marketing Accelerators. Six-week intensive coaching programs where you decide the strategy, do the work, and deliver the goods. New topic each quarter.

Communications Director Mentoring Program. The ultimate six-month professional development program for nonprofit communications directors. January–June and July–December sessions.

