



# 2017



## NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS Trends Report

#npcomm2017

# Tweetable Findings

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## Communications Staffing

Smaller org? You should have a larger percentage of staff devoted to comm work  
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Smaller orgs w/ annual budgets under \$1mil devote 21% of total staff to comms.  
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Mid-size orgs w/ annual budgets \$1mil-\$10mil devote 10% of total staff to comms.  
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Larger orgs w/ annual budgets over \$10mil devote 4% of total staff to comms.  
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Effectiveness increases dramatically when you reach 3 FTE on communications staff.  
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## Communications Budgets and Salaries

More nonprofits said staff and budget levels got worse than got better in 2016.  
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74% of nonprofits have a budget for communications. #npcomm2017  
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19% of nonprofits find money for communications only as needed  
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Only 7% of nonprofits spend little to nothing on comms beyond salaries. #npcomm2017  
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2016 salaries for communications directors at nonprofits increased 11.5% over 2015.  
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Average 2016 salary for nonprofit communications directors located in the US was \$64,647. #npcomm2017  
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## Time on Communications

Nonprofit communications staff spend most time on websites and email marketing.  
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Development staff spend most time on print marketing and events. Least on media relations. #npcomm2017  
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Most time-consuming comm activity? Writing/editing followed by tackling email inbox. #npcomm2017 <http://nmpmg.us/2017>  
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# Tweetable Findings

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## Communications Effectiveness

Average communications effectiveness self-ranking by nonprofits was 3.3 stars out of 5. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

When it comes to best practices, nonprofits ranked themselves highest on using visual content. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Most nonprofits said that collaboration with comm teams & fundraising staff got better in 2016. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Most nonprofits said that collaboration with comm teams & program staff got better in 2016. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

41% of nonprofits said the ability to focus on a set of priorities got worse in 2016. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

45% of nonprofits said the number of interruptions during the work day got worse in 2016. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Improve effectiveness: increase collaboration between comm and fundraising staffs. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Improve effectiveness: improve clarity about responsibilities #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Improve effectiveness: build management trust in expertise of comm staff. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

## Models for Communications Teams

Found 4 models for nonprofit comm teams - Integrated, Centralized, Internal Agency or CEO-led. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Nonprofits who rank their comm effectiveness higher had an integrated or centralized team. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Nonprofits who rank their comm effectiveness lower had a CEO-Led comm team. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Best comm team structure for fundraising? Integrated or Centralized. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

## Job Satisfaction

Overall confidence in communications jobs skills is up in 2016. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd

Job satisfaction among communications staff is down in 2016 over 2015. #npcomm2017 <http://npmg.us/2017> @npmktgd



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## Thank You to Our Models!

Throughout this report, you'll see photos of real participants in the Trends Report Survey and their co-workers. Thank you to every single one of them (especially those who were willing to make silly faces for us). See page 40 for a full list.

# What's New This Year

## A New Approach to the 2017 Trends Report

For the 7<sup>th</sup> annual report, we decided to shake things up a bit and ask questions that would provide brand-new data for the nonprofit sector.

After six years of research, the data on how nonprofits use various communications channels and the challenges nonprofit communicators face is solid. [Download the 2016 Trends Report if you want that data.](#)

**So, for 2017, we rewrote most of the survey** to better reflect the questions in our field that were largely unanswered, except by anecdotal experience.

- What do most nonprofit communications teams look like?
- What are typical staffing and budgeting levels for nonprofit communications teams?
- What separates effective communications teams from less effective ones?
- Just how important are fundraising goals to nonprofit communications teams?
- Are we making any progress on well-known challenges in the field?

**We plan to use this approach every other year:** In odd-numbered years like 2017, we'll focus on top-of-mind issues, progress on known challenges, and team functions and effectiveness. In even-numbered years, we'll focus more on tactical trends around communications channels and the content that goes out in them.

## New Data on Team Staffing and Budgets

To our knowledge, there's no good data about the typical staff or budget size of a nonprofit communications team – until now. We've calculated the **average sizes for a communications team and budget** based on the overall staffing and budget size of the nonprofit. See page 9.



### New Data on Communications Team Models

We also have new data on **how communications teams are structured**. Through our coaching and consulting work, we've known for a long time that nonprofits use a handful of different models to staff and manage their communications work. We now have solid data about the **four models that dominate the nonprofit sector** and how they differ. See page 36.

### New Ways to Measure Communications Effectiveness in the Sector

*Effectiveness is the ability to produce a desired result.*

**For nonprofit communications teams, those "desired results" are always a mix of communications goals**, from community engagement around issues, to brand building, to recruiting program participants and volunteers, to fundraising, and more.

**How we define and measure the "ability to produce" those desired results are equally varied.** The traditional ways of measuring communications success often don't apply in the nonprofit world (sales

figures), and when they do, they are far too time-consuming and expensive for most nonprofits to attempt (e.g., public polling or attitudinal and behavioral research).

As part of our ongoing work to help nonprofits large and small better assess their own communications effectiveness in easy, manageable ways, we asked a few different sets of questions to explore communications progress in the sector.

#### **We asked participants to assess the state of their work by**

- **A simple ranking of their overall communications effectiveness** in 2016, on a scale of 1 to 5 stars. See page 25.
- **Scoring their organization's marketing maturity** on a series of marketing fundamentals. See page 26.
- **Whether their organizations are doing better or worse** on a series of common challenges for nonprofit communicators that affect day-to-day productivity. See page 29.
- Rating their **personal level of confidence** in their job skills **and overall job satisfaction**. See page 35.

# What's New

## How We've Sliced and Diced the Data

Throughout the report, we share many **statistically significant differences at a 99% confidence level.**

You'll notice that we present the data in three different ways:

**The overall results**, based on responses from all 1,104 participants who completed the survey.

**The results by the job title** of the survey participant, focusing on three groupings:

Communications Directors and Coordinators (513 participants)



Combined Development/Communications Directors and Coordinators (a new category this year, with 170 participants)



Development Directors and Coordinators (116 participants)



For a few strategic questions, we also include Executive Directors (115 participants).



## What's New

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**The results by the communications team model** within the organization

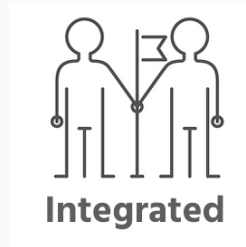
**Integrated Teams.** Communications staff and fundraising staff work on an integrated team and jointly decide on the communications workload (219 participants).

**Centralized Teams.** Communications staff set the communications/marketing strategy and define their own workload (199 participants).

**Internal Agencies.** Communications staff are a tactical "internal agency" with its workload determined by other departments that need work done (194 participants).

**CEO-Led Teams.** Communications staff work directly for the CEO or executive director who determines the workload (211 participants).

**Where there are other interesting differences, we'll point them out.** For example, size of the organization often influences the data in significant ways. But we've found over the years that factors like the nonprofit's mission and geographic location don't affect the survey results as much as you might think, if at all. **See page 38 for some standouts.**





# Communications Team Size

On average, nonprofits have 1 full-time communications staff member for every 8 employees. However, the overall budget and staffing of a nonprofit is a better indicator of appropriate staffing for a communications team.

**The smaller your organization, the larger the percentage of your staff that should be devoted to communications work.**

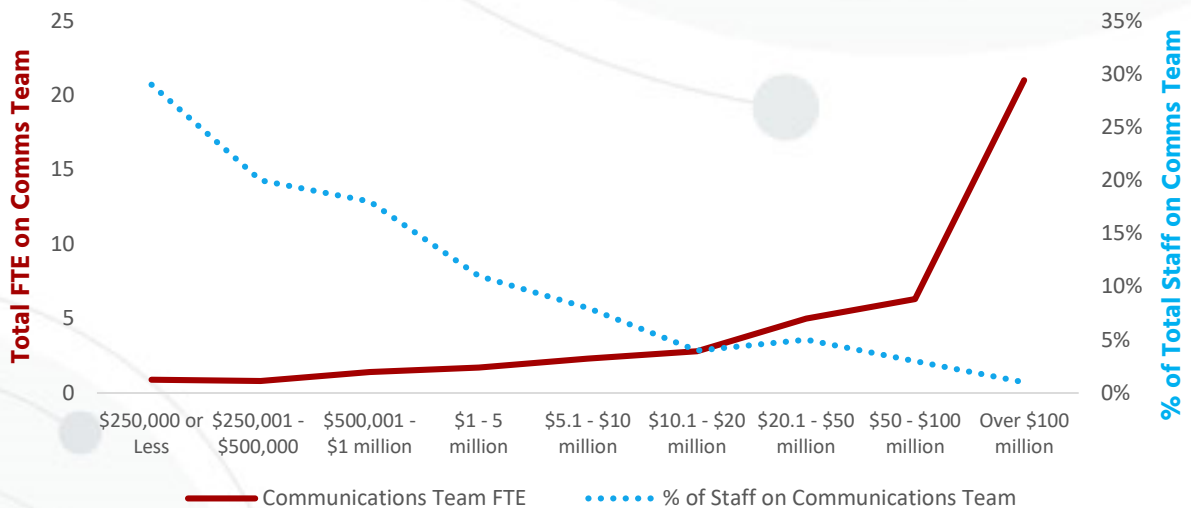
That's because there's a certain baseline of communications work that all nonprofits should be doing. As the overall budget of the organization grows, the percentage of staff on communications will decline (see the blue dotted line in the chart below), while the number of FTE – full-time equivalents – on the team grows (red line in chart below).

Smaller organizations with annual budgets **under \$1 million devote 21%** of their total staff to communications.

Mid-size organizations with annual budgets **between \$1 million and \$10 million devote 10%** of their total staff to communications.

Larger organizations with annual budgets **above \$10 million devote 4%** of their total staff to communications.

## Average Communications Team Staffing, by Overall Budget of the Nonprofit



# Communications Team Size

**The nonprofits with the most effective communications don't necessarily have larger than average communications teams.**

However, a warning for nonprofits with budgets under \$1 million: Don't short-change your communications. The least effective nonprofits at this budget level devote only 15% of their staff to communications, rather than 21%.



## Team Size Sweet Spot

Effectiveness increases dramatically when you reach 3 FTE on communications. Marketing maturity – implementation of marketing fundamentals – also improves dramatically as you approach 3 FTE.



## Average Communications Team Size, by Overall Budget of the Nonprofit

	\$250,000 or Less	\$250,001 - \$500,000	\$500,001 - \$1 million	\$1 - \$5 million	\$5.1 - \$10 million	\$10.1 - \$20 million	\$20.1 - \$50 million	\$50 - \$100 million	Over \$100 million
Comms Team FTE	.9	.8	1.4	1.7	2.3	2.8	5.0	6.3	21
% of Staff on Comms Team	29%	20%	18%	11%	8%	4%	5%	3%	1%

## Communications Team Size

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We asked survey participants to tell us what a new person would do, if their communications team were to grow by one full-time person.

Here are some of the most frequent responses:

- Social media (posting, managing)
- Graphic design
- Content creation
- PR/Media relations
- Administrative help
- Email communications
- Fundraising



# Communications Budgets

74% of nonprofits have a budget for communications. 19% find the money for communications as needed, without a specific budget. Only 7% spend little to nothing on communications beyond salaries.

**Collecting data on communications budgets in the nonprofit sector has always been challenging.** Expenses are grouped in many different ways, and communications teams don't always know or manage budget items related to the technology they use, for example.

To make data collection easier, we provided budget ranges to select from. We specified that the budget was for external expenses – not salaries – and would include things like printing, email marketing, advertising, freelancers, etc.

In the chart below, you'll see how communications budgets slowly climb as an organization grows.

On the following page, you'll see a much more detailed chart. Here's how to read it: Find your nonprofit's overall budget size along the bottom. Then look at the colored bars above it, and you'll see the distribution of the various communications budget sizes.

For example, if your nonprofit is in the \$5.1 – \$10 million range overall, you can see that 17% of nonprofits at that size have communications budgets of \$100,000 – \$300,000.

## Median Budgets for External Communications Expenses, by Overall Budget of the Nonprofit

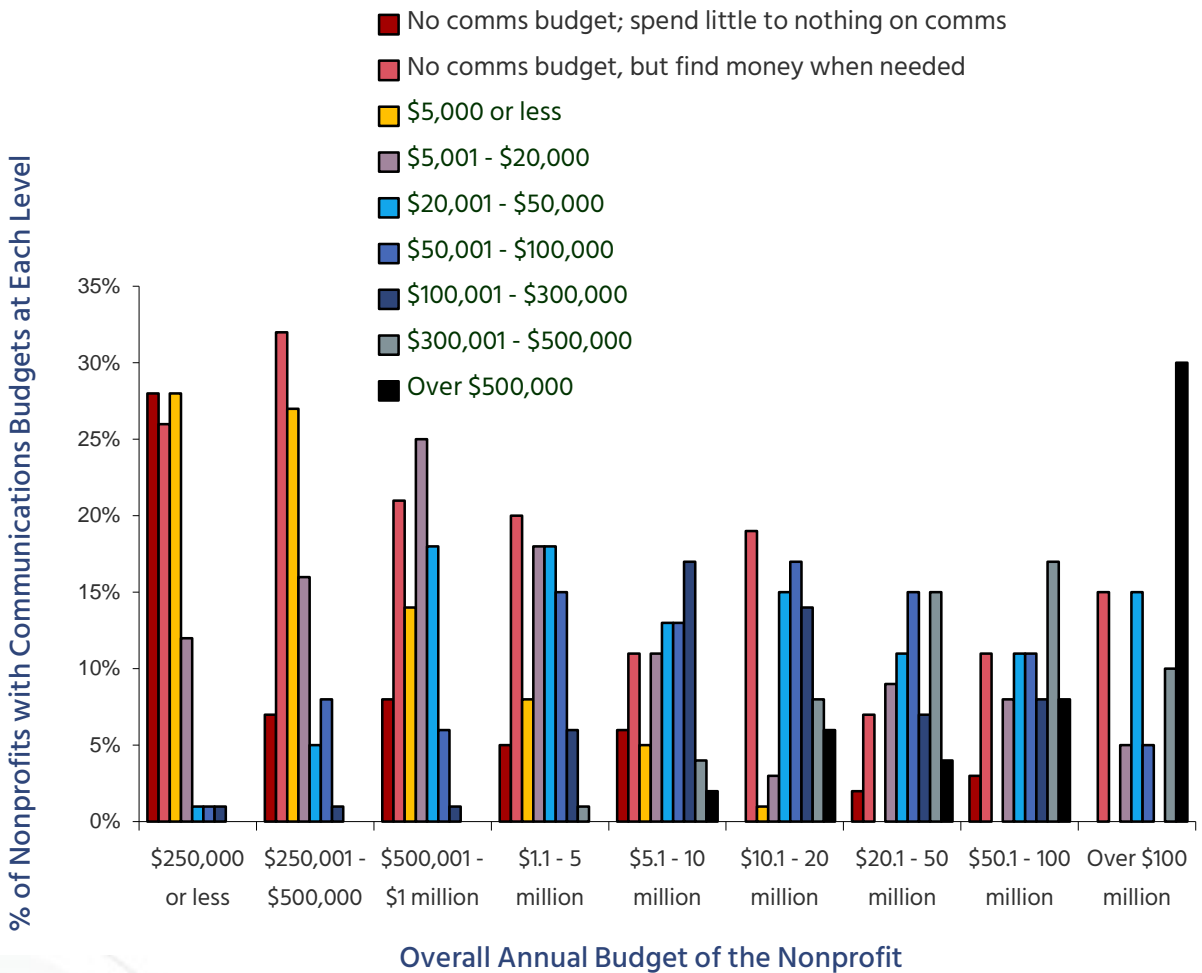
	Up to \$500,000	\$500,001 – \$1 million	\$1 – \$5 million	\$5.1 - \$50 million	\$50 - \$100 million	Over \$100 million
Median Budget Range	\$5,000 or less	\$5,000 - \$20,000	\$20,000 - \$50,000	\$50,000 - \$100,000	\$100,000 - \$300,000	\$300,000 - \$500,000



# Communications Budgets

## Annual Budget for External Communications Expenses, Excluding Salaries

(e.g. printing, email marketing, advertising, freelancers, etc.)



# Communications Salaries

This year, in addition to asking for salary data, we also asked for a cost of living category, to better reflect the differences not only in the size of nonprofit organizations, but also where they are based.

## U.S. National Average Annual Salaries for Communications Positions

Job Title	2016 Salary	2015 Salary	Change
<b>Communications Director</b>	\$64,647	\$57,987	+11.5%
<b>Communications Coordinator</b>	\$40,129	\$37,999	+5.6%
<b>Combined Communications and Development Director</b>	\$61,984	NA	
<b>Combined Communications and Development Coordinator</b>	\$38,752	NA	

## U.S. Average Salaries by Organization Size

	National Average	\$500,000 or Less	\$500,000 - \$5 million	\$5.1 - \$20 million	\$20.1 - \$100 million	Over \$100 million
<b>Communications Director</b>	\$64,647	\$30,200	\$57,730	\$70,886	\$88,421	\$112,889
<b>Communications Coordinator</b>	\$40,129	\$24,000	\$38,767	\$41,200	\$47,111	\$53,500
<b>Combo Comms/Dev Director</b>	\$61,984	\$33,163	\$57,909	\$71,933	\$103,545	*
<b>Combo Comms/Dev Coordinator</b>	\$38,752	\$33,250	\$38,933	\$40,750	\$43,400	*

U.S. salary data is based on responses from 348 Communications Directors, 84 Communications Coordinators, 104 Combined Communications and Development Directors, and 33 Combined Communications and Development Coordinators.

\* Insufficient data in this category

# Communications Salaries

## U.S. Average Salaries by Cost of Living Category

The cost of living categories were described in the survey as follows:

- **Very High:** New York, Honolulu, San Francisco, Washington DC, Anchorage
- **High:** Chicago, Seattle, Boston, Minneapolis, Miami, Oakland
- **Moderate to High:** New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Calgary, Orlando, Charlotte, Houston
- **Affordable to Moderate:** Phoenix, San Antonio, Ann Arbor, Montreal, Salt Lake City, Omaha, Mobile, Oklahoma City
- My organization is based in a **more affordable area** than those reflected above.

	National Average	Affordable	Affordable to Moderate	Moderate to High	High	Very High
<b>Communications Director</b>	\$64,647	\$45,378	\$52,781	\$65,522	\$79,710	\$82,089
<b>Communications Coordinator</b>	\$40,130	\$37,250	\$38,826	\$40,917	\$41,267	\$47,790
<b>Combo Comms/Dev Director</b>	\$61,984	\$46,469	\$55,167	\$66,531	\$61,333	\$85,033
<b>Combo Comms/Dev Coordinator</b>	\$38,752	\$36,000	\$36,000	\$40,000	\$46,667	*



## Communications Salaries

### U.S. Communications Director Salaries by Organization Size and Cost of Living Combined

	<b>National Average</b>	<b>Affordable</b>	<b>Affordable to Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
<b>National Average</b>	\$63,675	\$45,338	\$53,260	\$62,882	\$78,143	\$80,302
<b>\$500,00 or Less</b>	\$32,712	\$23,800	\$36,400	*	*	*
<b>\$500,001 - \$5 million</b>	\$57,672	\$41,845	\$48,732	\$54,233	\$74,951	\$68,444
<b>\$5.1 million - \$20 million</b>	\$70,527	\$55,444	\$61,800	\$68,974	\$81,286	\$81,568
<b>\$20.1 million or more</b>	\$90,594	*	\$68,000	\$83,063	\$88,928	\$116,333

### Canadian National Average Annual Salaries for Communications Positions

While we have relatively little data on Canadian salaries compared to the U.S. data, we know the interest in the data is the same, so we are providing it. We did not specify currency other than “whole dollars” in the survey, so we assume American participants used American dollars, and Canadian participants used Canadian dollars.

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>2016 Salary</b>
<b>Communications Director</b>	\$64,095
<b>Communications Coordinator</b>	\$38,667
<b>Combined Communications and Development Director</b>	\$79,000
<b>Combined Communications and Development Coordinator</b>	*

Canadian salary data is based on responses from 19 Communications Directors, 12 Communications Coordinators, and 11 Combined Communications and Development Directors.

\* Insufficient data in this category



# Communications Goals

Nonprofit communications teams always work on a wide variety of goals. Some directly support program work, such as recruiting participants or volunteers. Some boost fundraising. Others support the nonprofit mission more broadly, such as community engagement, brand building, issue awareness, and advocacy.

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## **We surveyed nonprofits on 12 different communications goals.**

While the mission of the organization has little influence on most of the survey results, it does greatly influence which communications goals they say are “high” or “essential” priorities.

On the following pages – 3 goals per page – we show you the extent to which nonprofits with different missions are prioritizing each goal.

Generally speaking, organizations to the left of the chart prioritize the goals more than those to the right of the chart.

If organizations with a particular mission are placing “high or essential” priority on too many of these 12 goals, that’s a warning sign that they are not focusing appropriately on a limited set of goals.

## **Community Engagement and Education goals** are ranked highest by:

- Other Public Benefit Research of Advocacy
- Environment and Animals
- Human Services, Housing, Food, Jobs

## **Brand and Leadership goals** are ranked highest by:

- Philanthropy or Grantmaking
- International
- Other Public Benefit Research or Advocacy

## **Fundraising goals** are ranked highest by:

- Environment and Animals
- Human Services, Housing, Food, Jobs
- Education

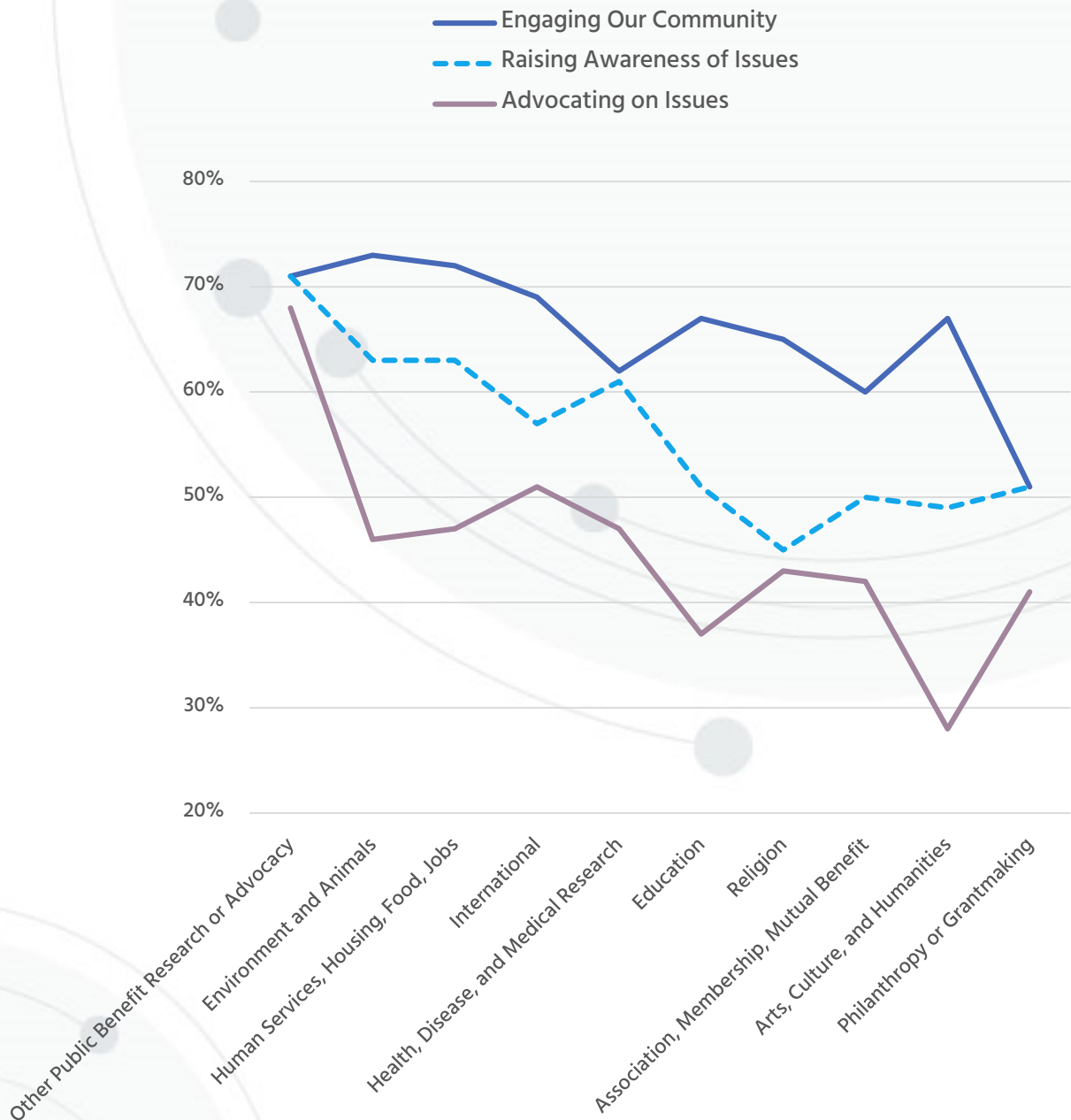
## **Program Recruitment goals** are ranked highest by:

- Association, Membership, Mutual Benefit
- Arts, Culture, and Humanities
- Religion



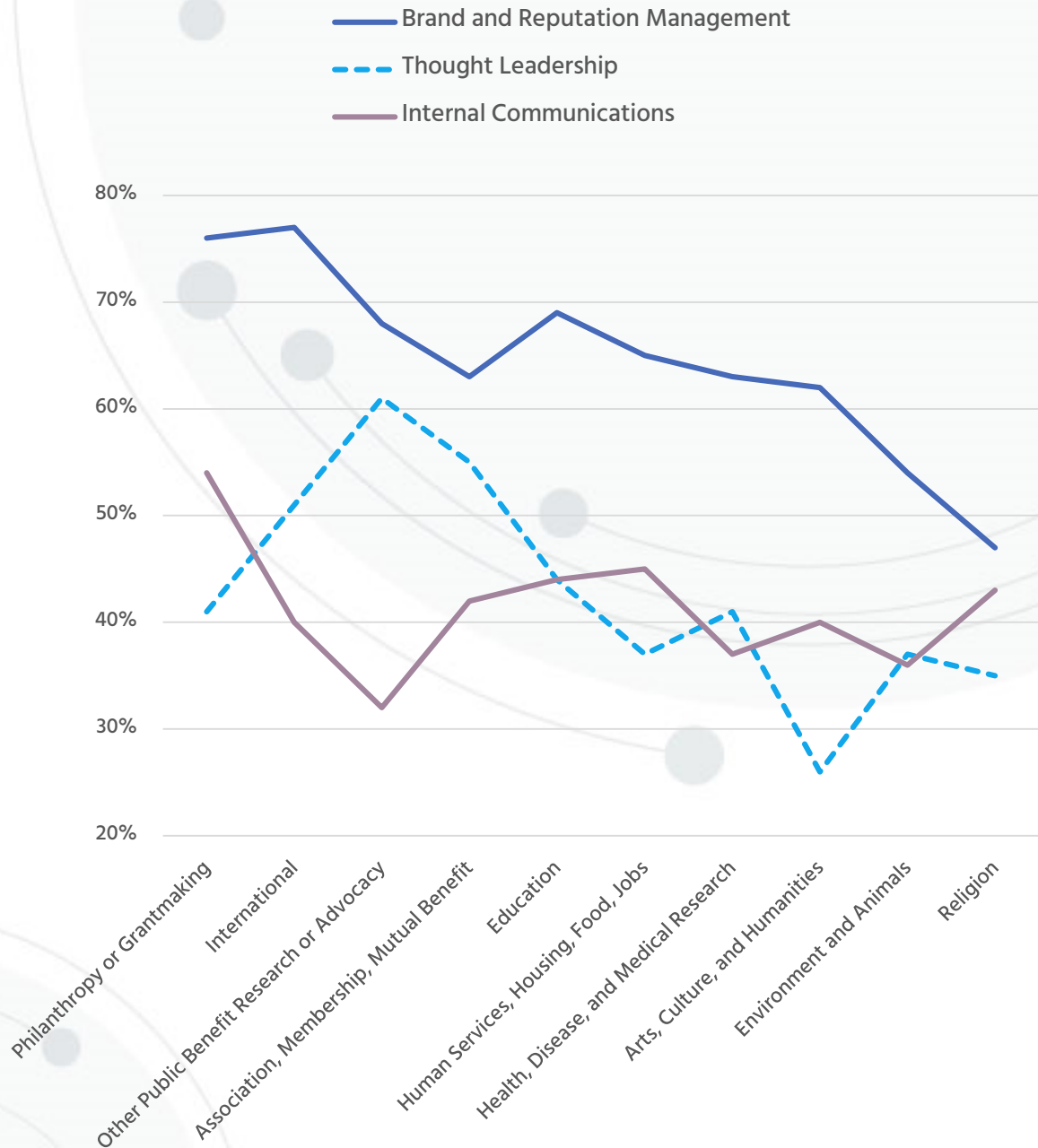
# Community Engagement and Education Goals

## % of Nonprofits that Say Community Engagement and Education Goals are a High or Essential Communications Priority, by Mission



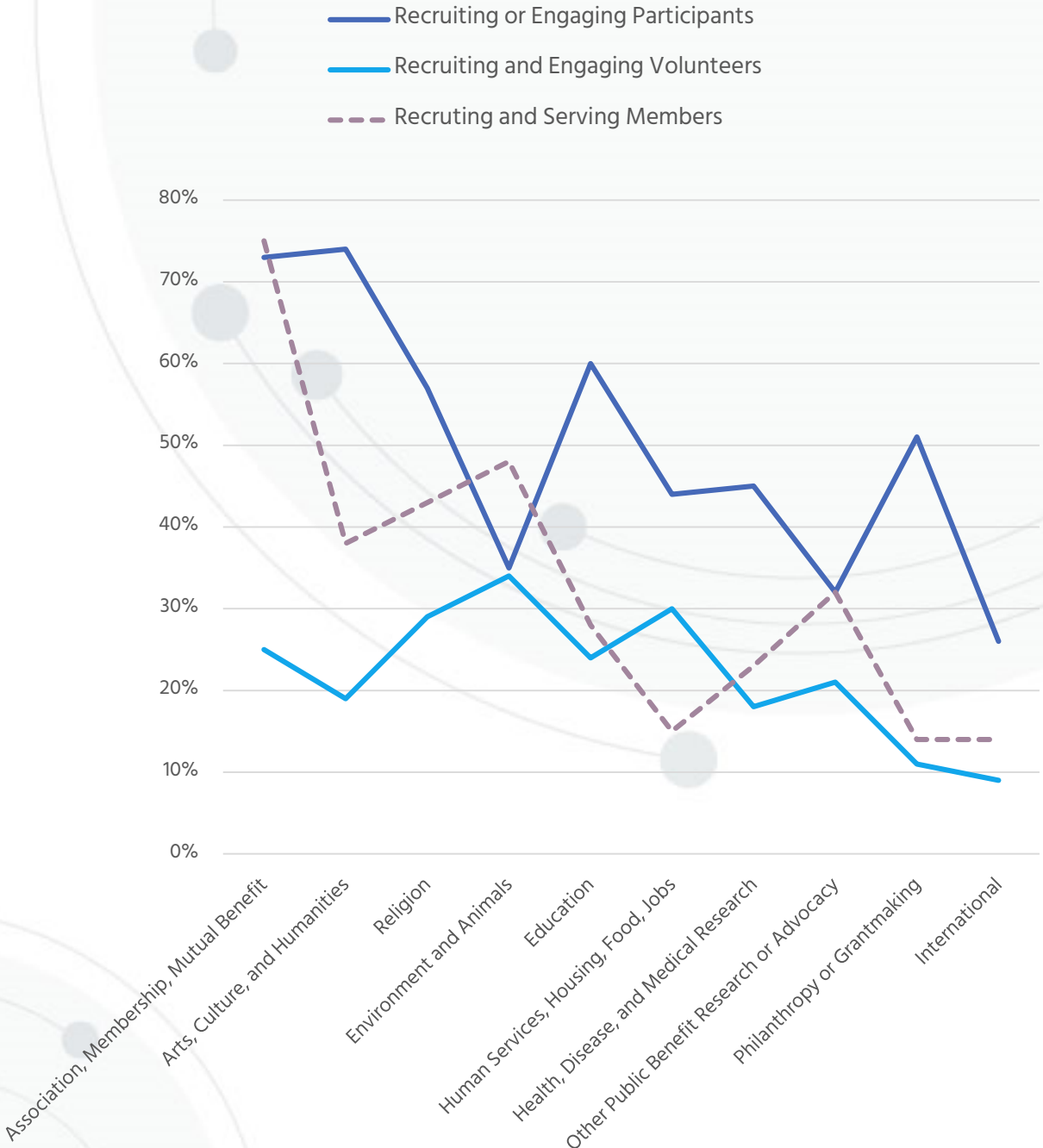
# Brand and Leadership Goals

% of Nonprofits that Say Brand and Leadership Goals are a High or Essential Communications Priority, by Mission



# Program Recruitment Goals

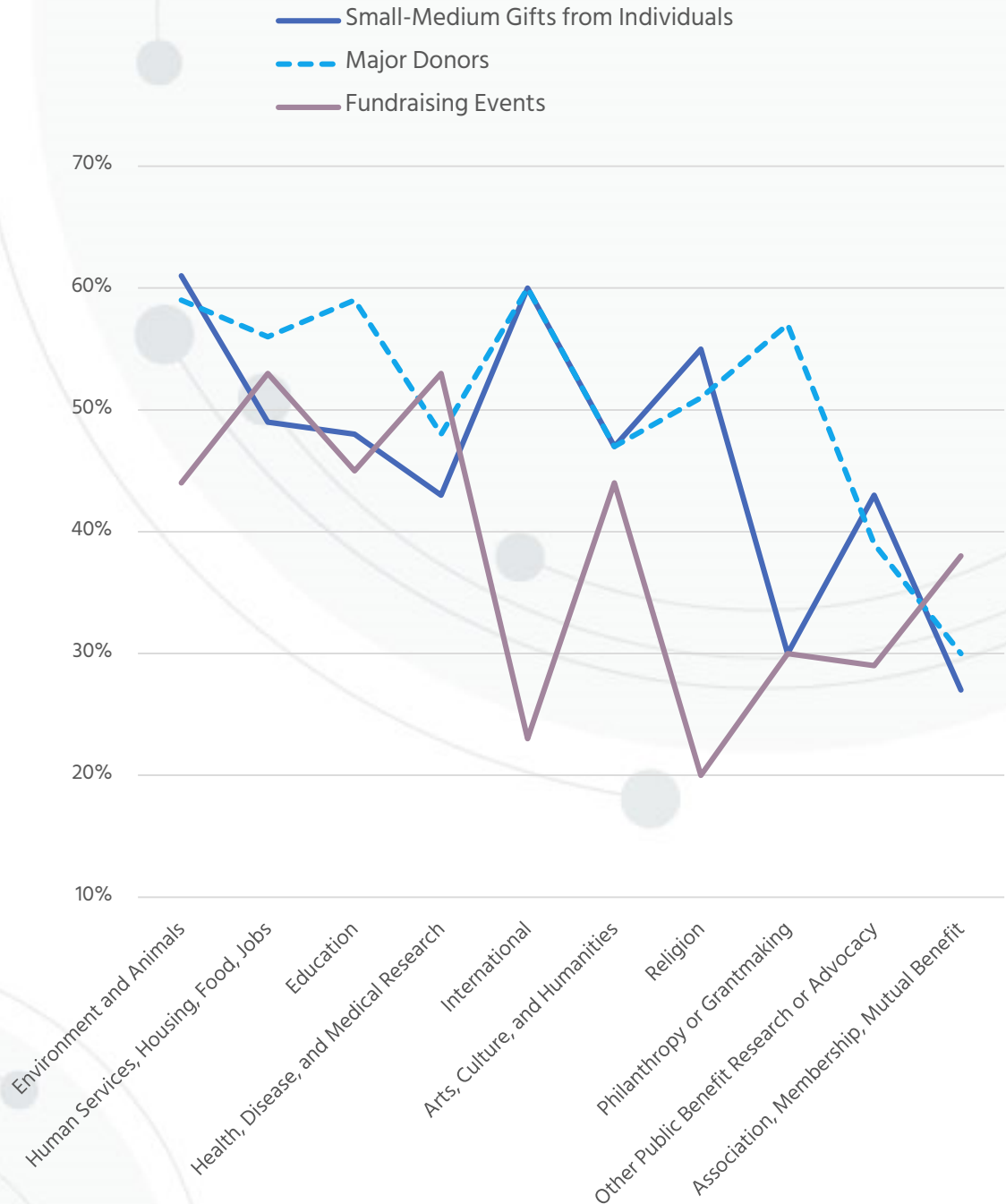
## % of Nonprofits that Say Program Recruitment Goals are a High or Essential Communications Priority, by Mission





# Fundraising Goals

**% of Nonprofits that Say Fundraising Goals are a High or Essential Communications Priority, by Mission**



# How Communicators Spend Their Time

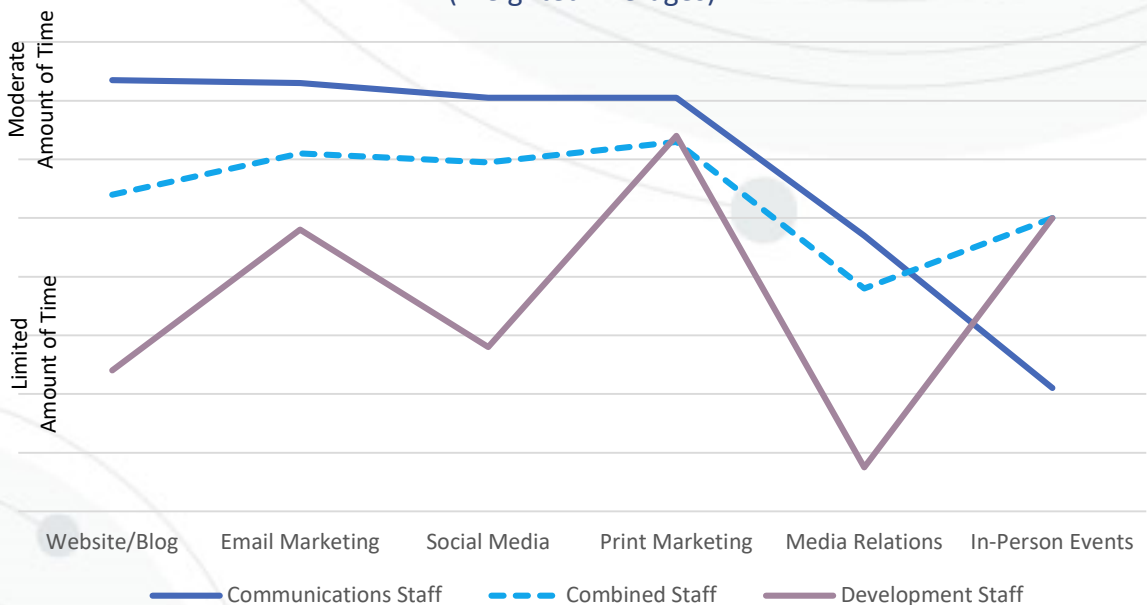
The amount of time spent on communications activities and on managing communications channels varies significantly based on your job title.

We know the **“Big Six Communications Channels”** from previous surveys, ranked in order of importance to nonprofit communicators: **website/blog, email, social media, print, media relations, and in-person events**. Nonprofits have identified these six communications channels as the most important since we started tracking the trends six years ago.

This year, we asked about the relative amount of **time spent on each of those channels**.

What’s most interesting is how this data varies based on job title.

### Time Spent Managing Communications Channels (Weighted Averages)



# How Communicators Spend Their Time

When we look at who spends how much time on which communications channels, **the key difference is time spent on in-person events.**

**Interestingly, in-person events was ranked as the least important of the Big Six in previous Trends Reports. But when we look at time spent on these channels, it's the primary difference.**



**Communications Staff**

Communications directors evenly split time among the first four channels, spend a little less on media, and even less on events. They are truly multi-channel managers. As would be expected, they spend more time overall managing these six communications channels than staff in other positions.



**Combo Comms & Development Staff**

Combination development and communications staff are a hybrid – they spread their time almost evenly across online, print, and media relations much like communications staff. However, they don't spend quite as much time on each channel, skimming off some time from each, which allows them to spend as much time on events as development staff.



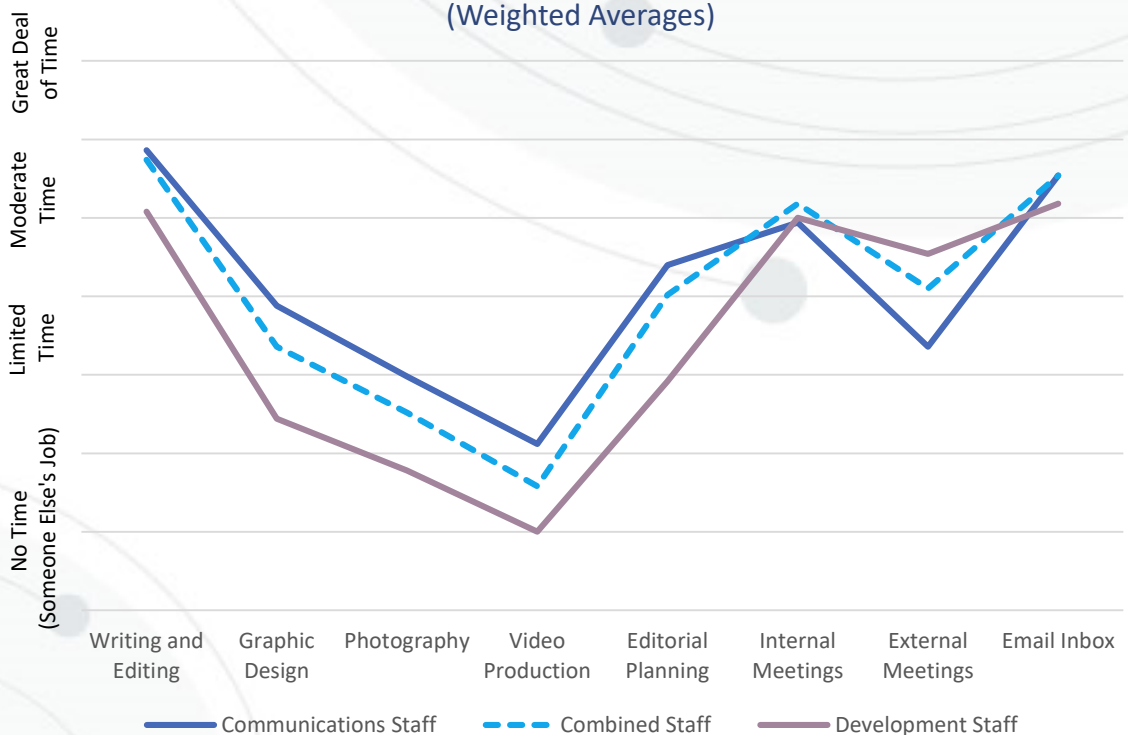
**Development Staff**

Development directors spend considerably less time managing any of the communications channels. Most development directors spend little to no time at all managing social media, the website, or media relations in particular. The major exception is events, where development staff spend much more time than communications staff.

# How Communicators Spend Their Time



**Time Spent on Communications Activities**  
(Weighted Averages)





# Communications Effectiveness

We measured effectiveness in four different ways: an overall 5-star rating, scoring on a Marketing Maturity scale, improvement on day-to-day challenges, and confidence in job skills and job satisfaction.



## How Nonprofits Ranked Their 2016 Communications Effectiveness

We asked nonprofits to rank their communications effectiveness on a 5-star scale, from 1 star (not at all effective) to 5 stars (extremely effective).

**The average was 3.3 stars, or between somewhat and very effective.**

Let's look at some of the key differences between organizations who ranked themselves as very or extremely effective (35% combined) and those who said they are not at all or slightly effective (11% combined) in 2016.

### Who Typically Ranked Themselves Higher (4-5 Stars)

- Nonprofits with staffing and budget improvements in 2016.
- Nonprofits with annual budgets between \$1 million – \$20 million.
- Nonprofits working on the "Environment and Animals."
- Integrated teams where communications and fundraising staff jointly decide on the communications workload.
- Centralized communications teams who set the strategy and define their own workload.

### Who Typically Ranked Themselves Lower (1-2 Stars)

- Nonprofits who saw their budgets cut in 2016.
- Nonprofits with annual budgets under \$500,000 or over \$100 million.
- "Religion" organizations and nonprofits working on "Health, Disease, and Medical Research."
- CEO-Led communications staff, where the executive determines the communications workload.
- Tactical "internal agency" teams whose workload is determined by other departments

# Marketing Maturity

We asked nonprofits to rank the adoption of 10 best practices or marketing fundamentals within their organizations.

Without carefully analyzing a nonprofit's communications work and results, it's impossible to know if they are ranking their own effectiveness accurately.

As a check on the 5-star self-ranking, we asked participants to also score themselves on our 10 "Marketing Maturity" questions.

These questions are much more specific about best practices and marketing fundamentals, and the rating scale is quite specific as well. They are an abbreviated version of a 35-question assessment we use with participants in our Communications Director Mentoring Program.

We did not identify these questions as a marketing maturity assessment within the survey, nor did we mention that a total score would be calculated based on their answers to these questions.

**We found that the Effective Rating correlated to the Marketing Maturity Score.** The higher the Effectiveness Rating, the higher the Marketing Maturity Score.

**There were no significant differences between nonprofits with different missions on either the Effective Ranking or the Marketing Maturity Scores.**



## The Marketing Maturity Scale

**Knowledge Zone**  
Aware - Ready  
10 - 39 Points

**Proficiency Zone**  
Capable - Skilled  
40 - 59 Points

**Mastery Zone**  
Expert - Authority  
60 - 70 Points

- 1 – **Unaware.** We are unfamiliar with this practice.
- 2 – **Aware.** We have basic knowledge of this practice.
- 3 – **Ready.** We are ready to begin implementing this practice.
- 4 – **Capable.** We've started implementing this practice and are gaining experience.
- 5 – **Skilled.** We are confident in our implementation of this practice.
- 6 – **Expert.** We are consistently outstanding in our implementation of this practice.
- 7 – **Authority.** We are a thought leader and innovator on this practice.

# Marketing Maturity

The **average Marketing Maturity Score** of participating organizations was 39, at the **top of the Knowledge Zone**, between Ready and Capable. Nonprofit communications in its current form is a relatively young profession, so this is not a surprise.

## Effectiveness Aligns with Marketing Maturity

**The least effective** organizations (ranking themselves 1-2 stars) scored an average of 28, **between Aware and Ready, squarely in the Knowledge Zone.**

Those ranking themselves as **somewhat effective** (3 stars) scored a 37, near the top of the **Knowledge Zone, reaching into the Proficiency Zone on several questions.**

**Nonprofits ranking themselves very effective** (4 stars) scored an average of 44, or between Capable and Skilled in the **Proficiency Zone.**

**Nonprofits ranking themselves extremely effective** (5 stars) scored an average of 50, right at the **Skilled** level.

## Smaller Teams Mature Quickly as They Grow

Nonprofits with no staff time devoted to communications scored just 26 on the Marketing Maturity scale – they are aware of best practices, but unable to implement them.

As staff are added, the score increases dramatically and then begins to slow down once you hit 3 FTE:

Zero Staff	26
< 1 FTE	35
1+ FTE	38
2+ FTE	41
3+ FTE	41

As noted earlier, larger team sizes alone do not automatically produce more effective teams, nor do they automatically produce higher Marketing Maturity scores.



# Marketing Maturity

Effectiveness Star Ranking	1	2	3	4	5
Marketing Maturity Score	24	29	37	44	50

Marketing Maturity Indicator	Average	Least Effective (1-2 Stars)	Most Effective (4-5 Stars)
Defining <b>specific target audiences</b> or core constituencies, rather than communicating to “everyone” or the “general public.”	4	3	4
<b>Segmenting email and print</b> mailing lists, and targeting advertising, so that people see content from you that is highly relevant to them.	3	3	4
Creating <b>content centered on the recipient</b> , including clear calls to action, and often using the second person (you, your).	4	3	5
Using a consistent and <b>recognizable voice, style, and tone</b> throughout your communications.	4	3	5
Regularly incorporating <b>visual content</b> such as photos, video, and graphics into your communications, rather than relying on text alone.	5	4	5
Using an <b>editorial calendar</b> that says what messaging is going out when and in which communications channels.	4	3	4
Building <b>content curation and repurposing</b> into your editorial process, rather than always creating original content from scratch.	4	3	5
Managing your website within a <b>Content Management System (CMS)</b> that multiple people on staff know how to update.	4	2	4
Managing your mailing list with a <b>Customer Relationship Management (CRM)</b> tool or database that allows you to track information, interactions and activities for each individual on your list.	4	3	4
Establishing and measuring <b>key performance indicators</b> for your primary communications goals and channels.	3	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>44</b>

# Managing Daily Challenges

How nonprofits manage the well-known day-to-day challenges of communications work is another indicator of their effectiveness.

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## What Got Harder for Nonprofits in 2016, and What Got Easier

**From previous research, we know the challenges nonprofit communicators face.**

Some of these challenges got easier in 2016; others got even harder.

### The Good News

**Collaboration Improved.** Most nonprofits said that collaboration within their communications teams, and with fundraising and program staff, got better in 2016.

But of course, there's always room for improvement: Only 34% of communications staff say they are consulted often or always about fundraising decisions. But 55% say they consult fundraising staff often or always about communications decisions.

Only 21% of communications staff say they are consulted often or always about programmatic decisions. But 55% say they consult with program staff often or always about communications decisions.

**Relationships with Executive Directors are Strong.** 52% of the most effective communications teams report exceptional relationships with their executive directors,

with just 4% calling the management relationship difficult.

Conversely, only 17% of ineffective teams report an exceptional relationship, and 30% say it's difficult.

**This is a very important relationship to communications effectiveness.** Strive for an exceptional relationship between the executive director and communications staff. Our research shows that a functional relationship isn't enough.

**Work Processes Improved.** Clarity about communications responsibilities and procedures, and the ability to experiment, improved in 2016 for about a third of nonprofits. Half said these stayed the same.

**Editorial Planning Works.** Nonprofits with effective communications are **three times as likely to use an editorial calendar** as those who say their communications are ineffective.

Effective communicators are also **twice as likely to invest significant time into editorial planning** as ineffective ones.



## Which Challenges Got Better in 2016

	Better in 2016	Same	Worse in 2016
<b>COLLABORATION</b>			
The level of collaboration within the communications team	50%	41%	9%
The level of collaboration between communications and fundraising staff	49%	38%	13%
The level of collaboration between communications and program staff	46%	39%	15%
<b>EXPERTISE</b>			
The level of expertise of individual staff members	47%	45%	8%
The level of management trust in the expertise of communications staff	40%	44%	16%
<b>WORK PROCESS</b>			
The extent to which a strategy drives our communications work	37%	43%	20%
Clarity about the processes and procedures for how the communications work gets done	37%	42%	21%
Clarity about responsibilities and authority over how the communications work gets done	35%	39%	26%
The ability to experiment often and to learn from failures as much as from successes	35%	50%	15%

We found few statistically significant differences between staff with different job titles. In a few cases, development directors were somewhat more pessimistic, and executive directors were somewhat more optimistic about progress on these challenges.

## Why Staffing and Collaboration Improved, in Their Own Words

“The communication team developed request systems that encouraged collaboration with other departments. These systems helped drive projects to begin with discovery meetings and end with discussion of the product between departments.”

“Better mapping out of project goals, timelines, and expectations. Meeting quarterly to review those - things we knew we needed to do but we actually did them this year.”

“We hired additional development and program staff, allowing me (our communications staff person) to focus more of my attention on communications! We also instituted weekly editorial meetings to keep on top of communications needs.”

“Our teams meet on a regular basis which has improved the flow of information between us. We also have worked hard to develop healthy relationships with our teammates.”

“I pushed for more strategic planning and educated program and fundraising staff on communications needs.”

“We hired a Marketing and Communications Coordinator position. This worked much better than having one person plan events as well as market the organization.”



# How Clarity on Job Responsibilities and Work Processes Improved, in Their Own Words

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“We implemented new processes, like using project management software for our editorial calendar and projects, and new approval processes.”

“Having a communications off-site planning meeting to establish priorities for the year with the executive director, a board member, the advancement director and communications director.”

“We implemented a communications request form. The goal is to prevent employees from creating their own materials and to funnel those requests through our team so we can ensure branding and voice are accurate.”

“There were better lines of communication opened between the communications coordinator and our supervisor. There was a communications calendar created to know exactly what was going to be communicated when.”



# Managing Daily Challenges: Where It Got Worse

## The Bad News

Of course, not everything is going well.

**Communications Staffing and Budgets Get Worse, Given Workload.** More nonprofits said their staffing and budget levels for their communications workload got worse in 2016 than those who said it got better. It stayed the same for about half of nonprofits.

**Ability to Focus on Priorities.** Over 40% of nonprofits said that focusing on a limited set of priorities, urgent tasks overtaking important ones, and limiting interruptions in their work days all got worse in 2016. Few nonprofits reported improvements in these areas.



	Better in 2016	Same	Worse in 2016
<b>RESOURCES</b>			
The size of our communications staff given our workload	19%	50%	31%
The size of our communications budget given our workload	20%	57%	20%
<b>WHAT DRIVES THE WORK</b>			
The ability to clearly focus on a limited set of priorities	17%	41%	41%
The extent to which urgent tasks overtook important tasks	11%	46%	43%
The number of interruptions during my work day	8%	47%	45%



# Managing Daily Challenges

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## Start Here to Improve Your Day-to-Day Effectiveness

We looked at the biggest differences between nonprofits who rated their communications as effective versus ineffective. Here's where the gaps were the widest – and where your focus on addressing the day-to-day challenges of nonprofit communications work can make a big difference.

**1. Increase collaboration between communications and fundraising staff**

**2. Improve clarity about responsibilities and authority over the communications work**

**3. Ensure that strategic thinking is driving the communications work**

**4. Increase collaboration between communications and program staff**

**5. Build management trust in the expertise of communications staff**

**6. Clarify the processes and procedures for how the communications work gets done**





# Confidence and Satisfaction

The final measure of communications effectiveness included in this year's survey is much more personal: How confident are staff in their skills and how satisfied are they in their jobs?

While some might argue that confidence in job skills and job satisfaction have little to do with the effectiveness of a communications team, we beg to differ.

People who work in the nonprofit sector often make sacrifices to do so. They often put up with working conditions that would not be tolerated in government or corporate offices.

Despite the challenges, they stay in the work because they find it meaningful. Therefore, professional growth and job satisfaction are essential to retaining these employees.

When employees are happy in the work, they stay. When they stay, they gain invaluable experience that increases the effectiveness of their organizations.

**Overall, confidence in communications jobs skills is up.**

**However, job satisfaction among communications staff is down.**

## Confidence in Job Skills among Communications Staff

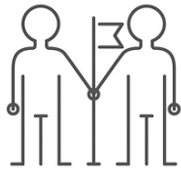
	2015	2016
Have a lot to learn and many knowledge and experience gaps to fill.	10%	8%
Comfortable with most of the work, but want to keep getting better.	53%	47%
Very capable, confident, and effective.	37%	45%
<b>CONFIDENCE TOTAL (Comfortable + Very Capable)</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>92%</b>

## Job Satisfaction among Communications Staff

	2015	2016
<b>Satisfied or Very Satisfied</b>	72%	66%

# 4 Models for Nonprofit Communications Teams

75% of nonprofit communications teams are organized in one of four ways, based on how the workload for the team is created. Distribution of the models across the sector is balanced, but effectiveness varies.



**Integrated**



**Centralized**



**Internal Agency**



**CEO Led**

## Integrated

- 20% of Teams
- Ranks highest in effectiveness and marketing maturity
- Prioritizes small-medium donors, major donors, and events more than others
- Most collaborative model
- Great model for nonprofits raising money from individuals

## Centralized

- 18% of Teams
- Close second for effectiveness and marketing maturity
- Great model when funding comes from grants, fees, and/or major donors
- Also works well with a tight partnership with a “separate but equal” development department
- Most confident in skills.

## Internal Agency

- 18% of Teams
- Tend to be bigger teams at very large nonprofits
- Full of skilled specialists, but they do not drive strategy
- Brand managers
- “Content mill” for other departments

## CEO-Led

- 19% of Teams
- Tend to be smaller, understaffed teams
- Most scattered; not as strategic
- Least effective and mature model
- Least confident in skills

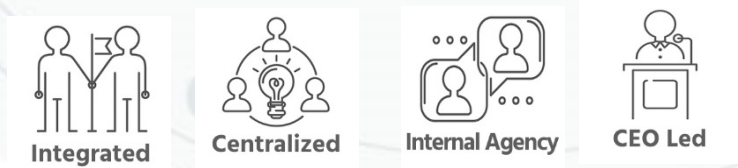
## 4 Models for Nonprofit Communications Teams

### How the 4 Teams Rank on Effectiveness

Let's take a look at how the four models for nonprofit communications teams vary based on the different measures of effectiveness that we've covered so far in this report.

Overall, the Integrated and Centralized teams outperform the Internal Agency and CEO Led teams on the majority of effectiveness indicators.

Now, that doesn't mean that Internal Agencies and CEO-Led teams can't be effective – it simply means that it's much more difficult in those scenarios. They do not appear to be naturally built for success.



	Integrated	Centralized	Internal Agency	CEO Led
Ranked Themselves as Very or Extremely Effective in 2016 (4 or 5 stars)	50%	42%	28%	24%
Average Marketing Maturity Score	41	40	39	36
Saw Improvements in Strategy Driving Communications in 2016	47%	41%	28%	27%
Very Capable and Confident in Skills	44%	48%	44%	33%
Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the Job	77%	71%	51%	55%
Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied with the Job	9%	13%	23%	21%

# Other Interesting Differences

Nonprofits often assume that the data in our Trends Reports varies significantly by organizational mission. In reality, we've found few statistically significant differences based on mission.

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## **Will the way an arts organization answers our questions vary significantly from a social service agency?**

Not as much as you might think. Over the years, we've found relatively few statistically significant differences based on mission.

This year, we did share some major differences related to how nonprofits with different missions prioritize different communications goals.

However, across mission groups, there are no significant differences (at a 99% confidence level) on effectiveness ratings, overall Marketing Maturity scores or job satisfaction.

## **There are a few standouts.**

2016 was good year for nonprofits working in the "Environment and Animals" area. They were most likely to say both staffing and budgets were better given their workloads. They also reported that the level of collaboration within the communications team was better.

Nonprofits working on "International" issues were most likely to report that collaboration between communications and program staff, and clarity about the processes and procedures for communications work, improved in 2016.

"Religion" nonprofits were most likely to report improvement in management trust in the expertise of communications staff in 2016.

Most likely to say that urgent tasks overtaking important ones got much worse in 2016? "Health, Disease, and Medical Research" nonprofits.

The four team models are prevalent across nonprofits with different missions. We found only a few significant differences:

"International" and "Health, Disease, and Medical Research" nonprofits were more likely to rely on the Internal Agency model.

"Other Public Benefit Research or Advocacy" nonprofits are much more likely to rely on the Centralized model.

# About the Trends Survey

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This report is based on an online survey by Nonprofit Marketing Guide during November 2016. The survey was administered using SurveyMonkey.com, with additional statistical analysis by MarketSight.com.

Participants were recruited primarily through email and social media requests by Nonprofit Marketing Guide and colleagues in the sector. As such, it is not based on a random probability sample where all members of a population have an equal or known chance of being selected.

The full survey was completed by 1,104 participants, and only completed surveys were used in the analysis. A smaller subset of questions on communications skills, salary, and relationship with the executive director were presented only to people who identified themselves as communications or combination communications/development staff (683 people).

87% of participants are in the United States, 7% are in Canada, and the remainder are from dozens of countries around the world.

32% have annual budgets under \$1 million, 33% have budgets between \$1 million and \$5 million, and 29% have budgets over \$5 million.

Participants represent the diverse mission areas of the nonprofit sector: 24% are in Human Services, Housing, Food, Jobs; 16% are in Education; 11% are in Health, Disease, Medical Research; and 9% are in Environment and Animals.

These demographics have changed very little during the seven years we've conducted the survey.

If you'd like to suggest questions for next year's Trend Report Survey, send an email to [helpdesk@nonprofitmarketingguide.com](mailto:helpdesk@nonprofitmarketingguide.com) with "2018 Trends Survey" in the subject line.



# Photo Credits

## Cover

- Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic Engagement Team Photo submitted by Noel McClain
- Tracy Hutchinson Wallace, Communications Officer, Habitat for Humanity® Trinidad & Tobago

## What's New This Year

Page 5

- Jessica Hodgdon, Digital Communications Manager, and Tiffany Narváez, PR and Marketing Manager, Los Angeles Conservancy. Photo submitted by Cindy Olnick

Page 7, From left to right

- Noel McClain, Marketing Coordinator, Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic
- Andy Wolfe, President and Creative Director, Mariner Media
- Thea D. Chassin, Founder and CEO, Bald Girls Do Lunch Inc.
- Robert Carnes, Marketing and Communications Manager, Make-A-Wish Georgia
- Karen Brady, Acting Vice President, Marketing and Communications United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County

Page 8

- Staff outing, Make-A-Wish® Greater Bay Area. Photo submitted by Jen Wilson

# Photo Credits

## Communications Team Size

Page 10, From left to right

- Women of the ELCA Team. Photo submitted by Terri Lackey
- Engagement Team, Cassandra Sanborn, Maggie Johnson, and Noel McClain at Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic. Photo submitted by Noel McClain

Page 11, From top to bottom

- Melissa Fordyce, Director of Communications, Presby's Inspired Life
- Dot Tom, Bible League International. Photo submitted by Hilton Edwards
- Denise Comer, Athletics Administrative Assistant, Peter Sfragidas, Athletics Communications Associate and Jeanine Marlow, Director of Communications and Marketing at Cornerstone Preparatory Academy

## Communications Salaries

Page 15, From left to right

- Nancy Starner, Director of Development and Communications, Preterm
- Ralph Penning, Business Professional Services Limited
- Justin Kern, Marketing and Communications Manager, Make A Difference - Wisconsin
- Susan Daily, Director of Development, The College Settlement Camps
- Cindy Olnick, Director of Communications, Los Angeles Conservancy

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## Communications Goals

Page 17

- Lani Naihe, Director of Advancement, MDI Hospital Photo submitted by Oka Hutchins

## How Communicators Spend Their Time

Page 23

- Karen Cutliff, Marketing Coordinator, Legal Aid of Western Missouri

Page 24, From left to right

- Christine Gilliland, Owner, Project Manager, Way Up Strategic Solutions
- Hilton Edwards, Marketing and Development Director, Bible League International
- Jeanine Marlow, Director of Communications and Marketing, Cornerstone Preparatory Academy
- Resource Development at Habitat for Humanity® Trinidad & Tobago. Photo submitted by Tracy Hutchinson Wallace.

## Marketing Maturity

Page 27, From left to right

- Sheri Booms Holm, Communications Director, West Central Initiative
- Jen Wilson, Marketing Director, Make-A-Wish® Greater Bay Area
- Robin Ellington, Director of Marketing, CLASS, Inc.
- Joelyn Bush, Marketing and Communications Manager, United Way, Erie
- Sheila Helgerson, Executive Director, United Ministries, Inc.
- Terri Lackey, Director for Communication, Women of the ELCA.
- Delton McGuire, Chief Development Officer, Cherokee Home for Children

# Photo Credits

## Managing Daily Challenges

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- Photo submitted by Noel McClain, Marketing Coordinator, Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic
- Vaya Kiel, Communications Specialist, and John Weyenberg, Executive Director, Greater Fox Cities Area Habitat for Humanity

Page 32, From top to borrom

- Chris Soto, Senior Editor, Land Trust Alliance
- Juliette Coletto, Bible League International. Photo submitted by Hilton Edwards

Page 33, From left to right

- Miriam Robbins, Director of Marketing, with development team at Grand Canyon Association
- Miriam Robbins, Director of Marketing, Grand Canyon Association

Page 34, From top to bottom

- Jeanine Marlow, Director of Communications & Marketing, Cornerstone Preparatory Academy
- Vaya Kiel, Communications Specialist, Greater Fox Cities Area Habitat for Humanity

# Keynotes and Workshops

Kivi Leroux Miller, Founder and CEO of Nonprofit Marketing Guide and author of this report, is available to present keynotes and workshops on topics related to this research.

- The Four Types of Nonprofit Communications Teams: Should You Restructure Yours?
- CALM not BUSY: How to Effectively Run a Nonprofit Communications Team
- The Right Ways and Wrong Ways for Communications and Fundraising Staff to Work Together
- What Every Executive Director Needs to Know About Successfully Managing Communications Staff
- Nonprofit Communications Trends: Today's Best Practices and Where to Place Your Bets for the Future
- Leveling Up: New Ways to Think about Communications Effectiveness and Marketing Maturity in the Nonprofit Sector



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