

# How to Fundraise When Everything Feels Uncertain

A step-by-step guide for tired, unsure, and stressed fundraisers  
...who want to feel like this again.



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*"Clarity, courage, and small steps that move you forward."*

You're Not Alone.

If fundraising feels impossible right now, you're not alone. Economic uncertainty. Political turmoil. Rising costs. Everywhere you turn, it feels like another reason to panic.

And let's be honest - many nonprofit leaders are panicking. They're assuming donors won't give. They're pulling back. They're hesitating. It's easy to sit back at your desk and not do anything, hoping it all gets better soon.

But here's the truth: The organizations that keep moving forward will be the ones that survive and thrive.

How do I know? Because I've seen it before.

At the start of the COVID crisis, many nonprofits were convinced fundraising wouldn't work. But the ones that leaned in - who told compelling stories, clearly stated what was at stake, and made bold asks - made it through. Some even grew.

Right now, you have that same choice.

This guide is here to help you move forward - not by overwhelming you, but by giving you a clear, step-by-step approach that you can take at your own pace.

So let's take this one step at a time.

## Step 1: Shift Your Mindset From "I Can't" to "What Can I Control?"

When things feel overwhelming, the natural instinct is to freeze or withdraw. But in fundraising, motion creates clarity. The act of taking one small step will make the next one easier.

### Start here:

Instead of asking, "Will donors give?" ask, "How can I make it easy for donors to say yes?"

That simple shift changes everything.

## What's in your control?

- The stories you tell.
- The clarity of your ask.
- The relationships you nurture.

## What's out of your control?

- The economy.
- Politics.
- A donor's personal financial situation.

You don't have to fix the whole world. You just have to focus on the things you can do.

*You might be thinking: "But donors are struggling too!"*

**Yes, some donors are.** But many are still looking for ways to help. The key is talking to the right people in the right way.

## Step 2: Follow the COVID Playbook - Because It Worked.

Here's what we learned during the COVID crisis:

- Organizations that stopped asking for money struggled.
- Organizations that leaned into storytelling, urgency, and clear asks survived.
- Donors gave - even when things felt bleak.

*You might be thinking: "But this situation is different."*

**Yes, every crisis looks different.** But the principles of human nature don't change.

- Donors don't give because the economy is good.
- Donors give because they believe they can make a difference.

Your job is to show donors that they matter and that they can make a real difference.

## Step 3: Take Your First Action in 10 Minutes or Less.

When in doubt, do something small but meaningful.

Pick one of these actions to do:

1. Send a personal thank-you message to a donor.

2. Re-read a past appeal that worked.
3. Write a single sentence about why your nonprofit's work matters today.
4. Call a donor just to check in - no ask.
5. Draft a simple update email sharing a short story.

Why does this work? Because action breaks the cycle of inaction.

## Step 4: Use This Ready-to-Send Message to Get Back in Motion.

If you don't know what to say, use this little email template.

**Subject:** Thank you - and a chance to help again

**Body:**

Hi [Donor's Name],

I just wanted to reach out today and say thank you.

Because of you, [specific impact—e.g., 10 families had meals last night].

Right now, more families are waiting for help. If you're in a position to give again, your gift can [concrete outcome—e.g., provide 3 more meals tonight].

Here's how you can help: [Donate button or link]

Either way, thank you for being someone who cares. Your generosity makes a real difference.

[Your Name]

*You might be thinking: "I don't want to pressure donors."*

**Remember:** Asking isn't pressure - it's an invitation. Donors can say no. But they can't say yes unless you ask.

## Step 5: Fundraising Action Checklist

Choose one or more actions to take today. Checking a box is your first step forward.

- Send a short thank-you email to a donor.
- Call one donor to check in.
- Write down one story to use in an appeal.

- Draft a fundraising email (even if you don't send it yet).
- Review past appeals to see what worked.
- Post a donor-impact story on social media.
- Ask your team to help gather new beneficiary stories.
- Plan a small, low-effort campaign for next month.
- Segment your donor list and send a message to one group.
- Personally reach out to a major donor with an update, gratitude, or a specific funding opportunity.

Need help with these actions? [Click here](#) for step-by-step guides  
→ <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com/quickapply-library>

## **Step 6: If You're Overwhelmed, Take a Pause - But Leave Yourself aBreadcrumb.**

If all of this feels like too much, you have permission to take a break.

But before you step away, write down your next step.

This prevents you from floundering when you come back. Instead of wasting energy figuring out where to start, you'll be able to click right back in.

### **Try this:**

Write a sticky note with the sentence:

"When I return, I will \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Examples:**

- When I return, I will send an email to [Donor's Name].
- When I return, I will review last year's successful appeal.
- When I return, I will draft a quick donor thank-you note.

Taking a pause is fine. Quitting isn't.

## **Step 7: Don't Do This Alone - Make Fundraising Fun**

Fundraising can feel isolating. But you don't have to do this alone - or at your desk.

## Find a Fundraising Partner

Pair up with someone either in your own organization or a friend at another nonprofit.

Meet up (in person or virtually) to:

- Brainstorm fundraising story ideas together.
- Write donor appeals side by side.
- Make donor calls at the same time.
- Share what's working and what's not.

## Take It Outside the Office

Meet somewhere fun:

- A park for fresh air and inspiration.
- A museum or gallery for a creativity boost.
- A coffee shop for a change of pace.

## Make It a Game

- **Challenge each other:** Who can write the strongest opening line for an appeal?
- **Timebox tasks:** Set a 20-minute timer and race to finish a draft.
- **How many donor thank-you subject lines** can you come up with in the time it takes to eat a slice of pizza?

Fundraising is serious work, but that doesn't mean it has to feel serious all the time. The goal is simple: move forward, have some fun, and break the inertia.

## Final Thought: You've Done Hard Things Before.

You've navigated challenges before. You've made things work even when it felt impossible.

Right now, you have two choices:

1. Pull back and hope things get better.
2. Lean in and take control of what you can.

Which choice gives your organization a better chance of survival?

You already know the answer.

Take one step today.

Then another tomorrow.

That's how you move forward.

Want More Help?

The Nonprofit Storytelling Conference is all about helping you connect with donors - even in uncertain times.

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