

# Own Your *Weird*



Crafting  
Fundraising  
Messages  
That Stand  
Out

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## Crafting Fundraising Messages That Stand Out

### Here are the six sections in this mini-course:

1. Why "Weird" Works in Fundraising
2. Identifying Your Organization's "Weird"
3. Weirding Up Your Fundraising Appeals
4. Email and Social Media That Pop
5. The Risk Factor: How to Get Buy-in for Unconventional Messaging
6. Formulas and Examples for Creating Your Own "Weird" Unique Fundraising Messages

### Why "Weird" Works in Fundraising

The nonprofit messages that stand out are the ones that get remembered.

Being "weird" doesn't mean being unprofessional—it means being memorable. When a donor encounters an appeal that surprises them, makes them smile, or piques their curiosity, they're far more likely to engage.

Example: Instead of a generic opening like:

*"Every year, thousands of children go hungry..."*

Try something unexpected:

*"Timmy didn't mean to steal the sandwich. But when your stomach's been growling for two days straight, your hands move faster than your brain."*

### Identifying Your Organization's "Weird"

Every nonprofit has a distinct personality—something that makes it unforgettable. The key is to lean into those unique traits rather than smoothing them out.

## Questions to Find Your Weird:

- What traditions, inside jokes, or unconventional habits define your team?
- Do you have an origin story that makes people raise an eyebrow or laugh out loud?
- What words or phrases do your beneficiaries, volunteers, or donors use to describe your work?
- Have you ever done something totally unexpected that turned out to be a game-changer?

Authenticity fuels compelling storytelling. Instead of generic messaging, focus on specific, colorful details that show your nonprofit's true personality. If your team celebrates every big donation with a dance-off, share that. If a major donor was inspired by a random conversation in a coffee shop, make that part of your narrative. The small, quirky moments make you human—and humans connect with other humans, not institutions.

## Examples of “Weird” in Action:

- A nonprofit that provides books to kids started by collecting donations in a bar's lost-and-found bin.
- An animal rescue that names every foster pet after a character from *The Office*.
- A food bank that tracks impact not just in meals served, but in “hunger-free school days.”

## Weirding Up Your Fundraising Appeals

Your first sentence should stop donors in their tracks and make them want to keep reading.

Examples:

- "It started with a goat in a taxi."
- "Imagine opening your fridge and finding... nothing."
- "John didn't believe in miracles. Until last Tuesday."

Hook your reader into a moment of transformation. Every story has a turning point—your appeal should place the donor right in the middle of it.

Sometimes, the best way to grab attention is to disrupt expectations. Here are a few ways to break the mold in your messaging:

- **Use humor:** "If you've ever tried to herd a group of toddlers, you know exactly what our volunteers go through every Saturday."

- **Use mystery:** "We found something incredible in an abandoned warehouse. And it changed everything."
- **Use contrast:** "The best day of Sara's life started out as her worst."

## Email and Social Media That Pop

Curiosity fuels engagement. Every great movie trailer teases the story without giving it all away. Your subject line should do the same—make the donor need to open the email to find out more.

Here are three subject lines that spark curiosity (feel free to use them):

- "Oops. We weren't supposed to tell you this."
- "A totally ridiculous (but true) way to save a life."
- "This isn't your average fundraising email."

## Weird Email Templates

The Unexpected Testimonial Email

Subject: "My mom thinks you're a hero."

Email Body:

"When my mom heard that you helped build a home for a family this year, she said, 'That's amazing. That's the kind of person I want to be.' She doesn't know you personally, but she's inspired by you. So am I."

"Your donation wasn't just a number—it changed lives. Want to do it again?"

## Donor Updates That Delight

Here are three unexpected ways to say thank you.

- **GIF Thank-You Emails:** A looping GIF of a beneficiary holding a sign saying "You're the best!"

- **Handwritten but Quirky Notes:** Instead of “Thanks for your support,” try “You just made 100 kids dance with joy. No, really.”
- **Surprise Impact Reports:** “We made a special video just for you—open this.”

Every donor wants to feel the impact of their gift. Use thank-yous as an opportunity to tell a mini-story about how their donation changed something tangible.

## The Risk Factor: How to Get Buy-in for Unconventional Messaging

Some leaders might be hesitant to embrace a “weird” approach. Here's how to get them on board:

- **Show data:** A/B test weird vs. generic messaging.
- **Start small:** Try unconventional subject lines first before overhauling an entire appeal.
- **Highlight success stories:** Find examples of other nonprofits successfully using personality-driven messaging.

## Formulas and Examples for Creating Your Own “Weird” Unique Fundraising Messages

Not every nonprofit knows how to break free from the generic mold of fundraising messages. That’s where these formulas come in—they give you a starting point to craft messages that stand out while still feeling authentic to your organization.

### 1. The “Surprise Start” Formula

Formula:

[Unexpected or unusual statement] + [Relevance to your cause] + [Clear next step for the donor]

Examples:

**“We never expected a goat to change our entire approach to fundraising.”** (Turns out a community gifted a goat to a donor in gratitude—help us give back in a bigger way.)

**“Most people don’t know that ice cream helped save three lives last week.”** (Our summer fundraiser was a sweet success—help us make it even bigger!)

## 2. The "Curiosity Hook" Formula

Formula:

[Intriguing or cryptic opening] + [Short explanation] + [Call to action]

Examples:

**"We found something in an abandoned warehouse that changed everything."** (It was a forgotten pile of supplies that helped us launch our biggest outreach yet—here's how you can help.)

**"No one ever talks about this part of hunger."** (Hunger isn't just about empty stomachs—it's about lost opportunity. Join us in changing that.)

## 3. The "Unexpected Comparison" Formula

Formula:

[Everyday relatable scenario] + [Tie-in to cause] + [Engaging ask]

Examples:

**"Losing your phone for a day is annoying. Imagine losing your home."** (For thousands in our city, this isn't hypothetical—help us provide shelter.)

**"Remember the frustration of running out of gas? Now imagine that happening to an ambulance in a crisis."** (Fuel shortages are real—your support can keep us moving.)

## 4. The "Story Snap" Formula

Formula:

[Start with a vivid scene] + [Introduce the emotional hook] + [Tie back to donor impact]

Examples:

**"Maria's hands were shaking as she opened the envelope. Would it be good news or another rejection?"** (She got the scholarship—because of donors like you.)

**"Jason's first night on the streets was colder than he expected. He wasn't sure he'd make it to morning."** (One warm bed could change his story. Will you help?)

## 5. The "Reverse Psychology Ask" Formula

Formula:

[Start with a common assumption or excuse] + [Challenge it] + [Give the donor an easy action to take]

Examples:

**"You probably think \$5 won't make a difference. You'd be wrong."** (It feeds a child for a day. Imagine what \$50 could do.)

**"Most people don't donate the first time they read an email. But you're not most people, are you?"** (Prove us right—give today.)

## 6. The "Weird Metric" Formula

Formula:

[Unexpected number or measurement] + [Tie it back to impact] + [Call to action]

Examples:

**"3,462 toothbrushes. That's how many we gave out last month."** (Oral health means better overall health—help us get to 5,000 this month.)

**"It took 27 pizzas to feed our volunteers last weekend."** (They showed up for us—can you show up for them?)

## 7. The "Reframe the Ordinary" Formula

Formula:

[Common phrase or cliché] + [Unexpected twist that makes it fresh] + [Donor impact tie-in]

Examples:

**"They say money can't buy happiness. But it can buy clean water for a family who desperately needs it."** (Your donation makes a difference—give today.)

**"What goes around, comes around. And when you give, kindness circles back in ways you can't imagine."** (Start the ripple effect—donate now.)

### How to Use These Formulas

1. Pick a formula that fits your nonprofit's personality.
2. Customize it with details from your cause or a real story.
3. Test different versions—A/B testing can show what resonates best with donors.
4. Keep a "Weird Bank"—a list of quirky, surprising, or unexpected stories from your nonprofit that you can use later.

By applying these formulas, your nonprofit can craft messages that stand out, engage donors, and inspire action. Give them a try, and see what weird (and wonderful) results you get!

**Your nonprofit is not generic.** Your fundraising shouldn't be either.

Own your weird.

Tell better stories. Raise more money.

## Want to Take Your Fundraising to the Next Level?

Join us at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference—the premier event for fundraisers who want to master the art of compelling storytelling. Learn from top experts, discover real-world case studies, and walk away with actionable techniques to engage donors and raise more money.

To learn more, go to <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

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