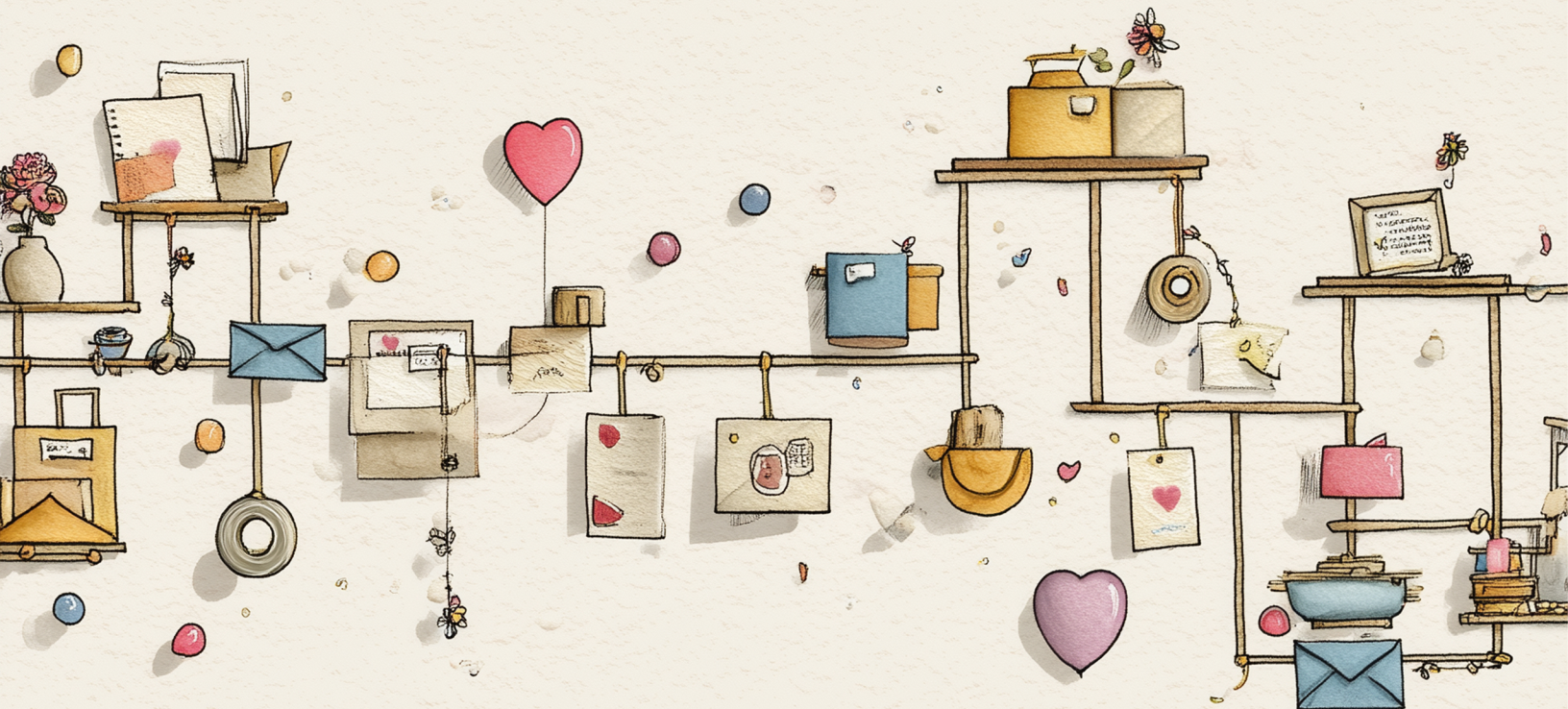


# The Extra Gifts Engine

A weekly campaign that brings in  
bonus gifts while building  
donor trust



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# The Extra Gifts Engine

*A weekly campaign that brings in bonus gifts while building donor trust*

This is The Extra Gifts Engine, a simple, low-tech campaign you can run every week to generate extra donations, keep donors engaged, and build a habit of generosity.

It's not flashy. It's not complicated. And that's why it works.

This idea comes from Steven Screen over at [The Better Fundraising Company](#), one of the smartest direct response minds in nonprofit fundraising. Versions of this approach have been used by community foundations, churches, and other types of organizations for years.

It's not new. But it *is* one of the fastest ways to build trust, show impact, and inspire giving—especially when you have small, specific needs that can be met quickly.

## Here's the gist of the campaign.

It's a simple, low-tech campaign you run every week.

Every Tuesday, you send out a short email listing 1–5 small, real needs in your community—things donors can fund quickly, like:

- \$40 for gas to a cancer treatment
- \$80 for a used crib for a newborn
- \$25 for a backpack for a student

Then on Thursday, you send a short follow-up email showing what happened—who gave, what was provided, and the difference it made.

This fast feedback loop builds trust. It shows immediate impact. And it makes donors feel *amazing*.

It's ideal for:

- Community foundations
- Direct service nonprofits
- Ministries or food banks
- Any org with clear, personal needs



## Why It Works

- Concrete needs = easy yes
  - Fast updates = trust and joy
  - Repetition = donor habit and momentum
  - Simplicity = something your team can *actually* do every week
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## What You're About to Do

You're going to:

1. **Build a Needs List:** Simple, fundable, human-scale needs
2. **Segment a Donor List:** A special group that *wants* to receive weekly needs
3. **Send the Tuesday Email:** Short, real, and personal
4. **Send the Thursday Follow-up:** What was funded, who helped, what changed
5. **Repeat:** The loop is the magic

Let's walk through it, step-by-step.

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## Step 1: Build a Needs List

Your **Needs List** is a running internal doc that your staff can add to each week. It should include:

- The dollar amount
- A short description (What the need is + Who it's for + why)
- The urgency or timeframe

Keep it simple. You'll only share a few of these at a time. Here's a sample:

Amount	Need	Why It Matters
\$50	Gas card for Sam	Needs to get to a cancer treatment on Wednesday
\$75	Diapers + wipes for Tanya	Mom of twins waiting for WIC renewal
\$25	Backpack + supplies	3rd grader starting school with nothing
\$100	Motel night	Domestic violence survivor escaping abuse
\$60	Utility payment	Keeps lights on for grandma on fixed income

**Tip:** Ask program staff every Friday: “What’s something small that would make a big difference right now?”

## Step 2: Segment Your Donor List

Create a new email segment called:

- The Needs List Crew
- Rapid Responders
- The Weekly Win List
- or whatever fits your brand

Start by inviting your board, key donors, and volunteers.

Then promote it on your website, in your main newsletter, and on social media:

“Want to help someone in a real, tangible way each week? Join our Weekly Win List and get a short Tuesday email with 2–3 small needs in our community. You’ll see exactly what your gift does.”

Let them opt in. This list will grow over time and become your most responsive group.

## Step 3: Send the Tuesday Email (Needs Email)

**Subject line:**

Can you help one of these neighbors this week?

**Body (copy/paste + customize):**

Hi [First Name],

Here are three real needs from our community this week:

- **\$50** for gas so Sam can get to his radiation appointment
- **\$75** for diapers and wipes for Tanya, a mom of twin infants
- **\$25** for a new backpack and school supplies for 3rd grader Malik

If you'd like to help with one of these, just **reply to this email** or **give online** and let me know which one you're covering.

I'll send a quick update on Thursday to show you what happened.

Thanks for being part of this. You make real change possible.

—[Your Name]  
[Your Organization]  
[Give link or reply instructions]

## Step 4: Send the Thursday Email (Thanks Email)

### Subject line:

Update: Sam made it to his appointment

### Body (copy/paste + customize):

Hi [First Name],

You did it.

Thanks to your generosity, here's what happened this week:

- Sam got gas money and made it to his cancer treatment
- Tanya received diapers for her twins
- Malik's backpack is packed and ready for school

These small gifts made a big difference—*fast*. And I'm so grateful you're part of this list.

I'll be back next Tuesday with a few more needs.

Until then, thank you for making life better around here.

Warmly,  
[Your Name]  
[Your Organization]

## Step 5: Repeat

The magic isn't in one week.

It's in the rhythm of doing this every week..

This simple builds emotional momentum, giving habit, and word-of-mouth growth.

It's one of the easiest campaigns to sustain and one of the most rewarding for your donors.

## Need Ideas by Sector

Here's a quick list of need types you can start with:

Sector	Need Ideas
Human Services	Gas cards, diapers, groceries, medicine co-pays, bus passes, motel nights, phone top-ups
Youth Programs	Sports gear, field trip fees, school supplies, tutoring session, snacks
Animal Rescue	Vaccines, food for a foster pet, adoption fees, crates
Arts Organizations	Art supplies for one student, gallery admission for a class, bus fare to rehearsal
Education	Books, pencils, headphones, warm coats, classroom snacks
Housing	Utility bill catch-up, application fee, baby gate or bed for a child

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## What If I Run Into Roadblocks?

This campaign is simple—but real-world logistics and policies can make it feel tricky at first. Let's take care of those common "yeah, but..." concerns now.

### **"We can't share names or personal stories. That's a privacy violation."**

Totally fair. Many orgs (especially in healthcare or domestic violence) can't use real names or details.

Here's what to do:

- Use **first names only** or **pseudonyms** ("Sam" instead of "John Smith")
- Be clear it's a real need, even if the name is changed
- Focus on **the need and the outcome**, not the full backstory

Example:

"\$50 for gas so one of our clients can get to a cancer treatment. He has no family nearby and no other way to make it there."

Or:

"A mom of twin infants is waiting for her WIC approval. Diapers and wipes would get her through the week."

Donors don't need a name. They need a **picture in their mind** of someone they can help.

### **"Do I need a separate donation page for each need?"**

Nope. Keep it simple.

**Option 1:** Use your regular donation page, and ask donors to type the name of the need (e.g., "gas card" or "Sam") in the comment box.

**Option 2:** Create a **simple landing page** just for this weekly campaign with a few fixed options:

- \$25 = backpack
- \$50 = gas
- \$75 = diapers
- \$100 = motel night
- ...and an open field for "Other"

You don't need to build a new system every week. Just collect donations, then match them to the needs behind the scenes.

### **"What if multiple people give to the same need?"**

Great problem to have!

Here's what to do:

- Fund the first need, then use overflow for the next urgent one on your list
- Or put it toward a recurring version of that need (e.g., "We always need gas cards—thank you for helping stock us up!")

In your follow-up email, you can say:

"We received more than enough for Sam's gas—so now we've also helped Jordan get to his appointment next week."

The key is to communicate clearly and celebrate generously.

## “What if a need doesn’t get funded?”

You can either:

- Mention that you’re still looking for help next week, *or*
- Quietly cover it with general funds and use the follow-up email to show the **impact of what did get funded**

Donors understand not every need gets met right away. But they’ll keep giving if they consistently **see success** and feel good.

## “How do I keep this from turning into another huge weekly task?”

A few tricks:

- Build a template for both emails so you’re only swapping in fresh needs + names
- Schedule a 15-minute Friday check-in with program staff: “What 3 small things would change a life next week?”
- Reuse needs that didn’t get funded the week before
- Batch your emails two weeks ahead if you’re going out of town

This campaign works because it’s fast. Keep it that way.

## You’re Ready

Start small. One email. One donor. One need.

That’s all it takes to launch this weekly campaign.

The success of this campaign hinges on one thing: how clearly and quickly you can tell a story. When you describe a real need in a way that hits the heart, giving becomes automatic.

At the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, you’ll learn exactly how to craft these moments—how to write fast, real, emotional stories that donors can’t ignore.

Come learn the storytelling techniques behind campaigns like this and leave with tools you’ll use all year.

Get your ticket at <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>