



 STELTER

Planned Giving Pulse Survey #2

U.S. nonprofits reveal how they're creating stability
and finding opportunity in an uncertain world



**Between April 30 and May 5, 2020,
The Stelter Company collected email
responses from 345 nonprofits nationwide
with established planned giving programs.
This is the second in a series of surveys
designed to measure the “pulse” of planned
giving marketing as the COVID-19 pandemic
casts its shadow around the globe.**

Overview

This survey sought to capture the second month of impact from the COVID-19 pandemic on current marketing efforts, job stability and planned giving budgets. We also polled planned giving professionals for the most successful ways they’ve discovered to engage with donors in recent weeks.

Nonprofits responded by vertical in the following percentages: Education (54%)—the majority of which (74%) was Higher Education—Healthcare (12%), Human Services (8%), Arts & Culture (8%), Environmental/Animal Welfare (6%), Public/Society Benefit (6%), Faith-Based (4%), International Affairs (2%) and Medical Research (1%). Due to rounding, percentages total more than 100.



Mindset

Nervousness around soliciting planned gifts appears to be waning as a majority of nonprofits (79%) move forward with planned giving marketing. This constitutes a 13% increase from our first pulse survey taken at the end of March. Most organizations (54%) describe themselves as fully committed to moving forward, with another 25% advancing more cautiously. Higher Education nonprofits were significantly more likely than other nonprofit verticals to fall into these top two categories. The percentage of nonprofits that say “now is not the time to solicit planned gifts” dropped nearly in half, from 11% to 6% since our first survey a month ago—a notable change regarding the attitude of nonprofits toward marketing in this environment. The remaining nonprofits say they have diverted focus to other priorities within the organization.

Timing

Among the nonprofits tapping the brakes on planned giving marketing, the impulse to delay has only intensified. The percentage of respondents who are uncertain when they will resume their marketing efforts has grown from 21% to 35% over the last month. More than a third of those (37%) plan to resume marketing efforts sometime in May, June or July 2020. Another 19% hope to pick up the pace in August or September

2020. Those who anticipate holding off until the fourth quarter of this year rose from 6% to 9%.

Budget

Although layoffs, bankruptcies and financial disruption have rippled quickly throughout our ecosystem, the effect on nonprofit budgets has been less swift. Yet, a sobering trend is emerging. The number of nonprofits whose budgets are unaffected by the pandemic dropped another 10% in the last 30 days to 60% overall.

The percentage of nonprofits suffering planned giving budget *decreases* doubled from 14% to 28% over a 30-day period. About a third of those experienced decreases up to 25%. Another 27% of respondents saw budgets cut up to 50%. A smaller percentage of those affected (7%) lost up to 75% of their budget. Higher education nonprofits were significantly more likely than other types of nonprofits to fall within these top three groups. Nine of the nonprofits surveyed that suffered budget cuts (10%) lost up to 100% of their PG dollars. The damage is unclear for nearly a quarter of nonprofits (22%) in the affected group, which are unsure of the amount they’ll lose—up from 15% in the month prior.

Six nonprofits (2%) saw budget *increases* of up to 50%.



Donor response

Despite fundraisers' initial trepidation, donors' response to planned giving marketing has been overwhelmingly positive. Only 1% of those surveyed described the interest or feedback around planned giving during the pandemic as "poor." The majority (41%) say response has been "Good: Interest and response is about the same." Nearly equal numbers say the response has been either "Excellent: We've received new gift intentions in light of the pandemic" (23%) or "Fair: We're communicating but not getting much traction" (26%). The remaining 10% are either not marketing at this time or have seen a mixed bag of responses.

Staffing levels

We included a new question concerning job stability to this edition of the survey. We were encouraged to learn that the large majority of those surveyed (83%) have not experienced furloughs or layoffs among planned giving staff, although 10% of organizations indicate that these options are under review. Of the 7% of nonprofits affected by staff reductions, 4% categorize those as "modest" and 3% say cuts were "significant." We anticipate, however, that staffing reductions may grow as organizations recalibrate their budgets for a new fiscal year and temporary relief programs wane. We plan to test these assumptions in upcoming surveys.

79%

Percentage of nonprofits that are moving forward with planned giving marketing

Despite fundraisers' initial trepidation, donors' response to planned giving marketing has been **overwhelmingly positive.**

28%

The percentage of nonprofits suffering planned giving budget decreases. That's an increase of 14% over a 30-day period.



What's Working?

3 Themes for Moving Forward

Our first Planned Giving Pulse Survey, published in April 2020, outlined an array of specific marketing ideas that remain viable today. [Download the full report here](#). This month, we're highlighting approaches that have proven particularly successful.

The common thread in all of the recommendations highlighted in these surveys is the notion of getting back to basics. As Americans embrace family meals, long walks and other simple pleasures, the best fundraisers are following suit. One nonprofit noted that maintaining its predictable pattern of communication provides focus for staff and keeps donors and prospects engaged. Focus on the fundamentals.

1 PICK UP THE PHONE

Phone calls, by far, remain the most common way fundraisers report connecting with donors.

Editor's Pick

"Phone calls—people who have been too busy are now available and interested in talking. We send a bag of our university-branded coffee in advance and ask to have

a 'coffee chat.' Our entire fundraising team doubled their outreach from last year. Most donors are still committed, but uncertain as to timing and amount of gift."

—Higher Education nonprofit

"Check-in phone calls. My donors REALLY appreciate it because they are in the high-risk category and are now isolated from family and friends. Many live alone or have health concerns."

—Higher Education nonprofit

"Lots of phone calls and emails to donors to check on them and let them know we are there for them if they need anything. Most have been thankful for the calls and have wanted to chat. Some have been interested in giving to newly created emergency funds in response to the pandemic."

—Higher Education nonprofit

"With no budget and the sole staffer in planned giving, I have been making phone calls to current supporters who have made planned gifts, to others who have expressed interest, and to those who have the potential to establish such a gift. I write notes, remember birthdays, and send emails where appropriate if that is the only way to make contact. I also have baked dozens of cookies and distributed them to a strategic list of supporters. Surprisingly, the Cookie Campaign has been very effective. I received calls and notes at my home, and several have

Editor's Pick



called a second time. It established a more informal relationship, which will make future conversations easier.”

–Arts and Culture nonprofit

2 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS FOR THEIR OWN SAKE

People are isolated and eager for meaningful conversation. Older Americans are particularly vulnerable right now and many perk up at the chance to talk, if for no other purpose than to receive some much-needed attention and compassion.

Editor's Pick

“Stewardship, and more stewardship, staying in contact with legacy members and prospects. There is a caution in the air, but this may be an opportunity as well.”

–Arts and Culture nonprofit

“We continue to deliver regular stewardship touches (e.g., birthday cards) and send information (e.g., news clippings, links to videos) when possible. Our emphasis is on organic communications. We are not reaching out to donors unless it seems natural. We are not actively soliciting planned gifts, but we are talking to donors and prospects.”

–Arts and Culture nonprofit

“Establish genuine concern for them and their family’s well-being during the pandemic. Share stewardship of previous gifts

by the donor and other projects of similar amounts. Stress this is not a ‘donate now’ kind of call but more of a ‘you held us close in the past, now we’re holding you close during these epic times’ kind of thing. Visit our (Stelter-built) website in case they have questions about ways to plan for what’s coming next.”

–Healthcare nonprofit

3 COMBINE APPROACHES

Develop a sequence of interactions, such as phone call + email or direct mail + phone call + email. With more time available to follow up, fundraisers are better able to concentrate their efforts around a targeted campaign.

“Had been planning a Stelter CGA mailing since January. It happened to drop on April 3. We used this as an opportunity to follow up with a phone call to ask if they received the brochure and if they would accept a personalized illustration. If we were not able to reach them by phone, we sent them an email containing an abbreviated CGA proposal for their review. So far we’ve sent out about 40 proposals and are in the process of completing one six-figure CGA as a result. We felt the mailing was providential as it gave our planned giving staff a focus during the crisis and a reason to reach out to our planned giving prospects.”

–Higher Education nonprofit



“We have continued with our newsletter, which dropped the beginning of April. Good timing. Then following up with phone calls from musicians. Staff are writing note cards at this point in time. Looking ahead at virtual meetings with PG prospects. Join us for tea or maybe wine with a musician.”

—Arts and Culture nonprofit



“We sent two initial large postcards first-class to members, one acknowledging the pandemic and reinforcing our mission and our programs, the second on the CARES Act.

I think these communications were effective in spurring people’s motivation to move forward on some gifts and estate intentions. Have also made efforts to call donors and send personal, handwritten notes. Still working through the list!”

—Public/Society Benefit nonprofit

“Checking in to ensure the health and safety of our donors, and also have been focusing on DAF donors.”

—Higher Education nonprofit

“Phone calls, emails, mail (in that order of preference) to all planned giving donors and prospects to ask how they are doing and (because we are faith-based) asking how we can pray for them now. Organizationally (not just in planned

giving), we will wrap up next week a 7-week series of webinars for donors talking about the needs of those we serve and how we are responding, which has been very popular.”

—Human Services nonprofit

“ We felt the mailing was providential as it gave our planned giving staff a focus during the crisis and a reason to reach out to our planned giving prospects.”

—Higher Education nonprofit

“A survey—both online and by mail”

—Medical Research nonprofit

“Recommendation: Include inspiring comments, meaningful gifts, notification of estate plan provisions in general messages from leadership.”

—Higher Education nonprofit



In business since 1962, The Stelter Company is the strategic partner nearly 1,500 leading nonprofits nationwide depend on most to provide expertise on cultivating valuable, long-term donor relationships through a unique combination of industry insight, customer focus and creative services.

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