

THE HIGHER ED ONLINE FUNDRAISING SCORECARD

A look at the **online giving experience**
and **email communications** of
109 Higher Ed organizations.

PRESENTED BY

iDonate



NextAfter Institute
FOR ONLINE FUNDRAISING

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Executive Summary

To better understand the online giving experience to Higher Ed organizations we made \$20 donations to 105 Higher Ed organizations – 51% Large Universities, 28% Small/Liberal Arts, and 21% Community Colleges – capturing 44 pieces of data throughout the process. We then tracked, classified, and analyzed the email communications we received from each organization for 45 days.

This is the same process and methodology used for past research studies like [The State of Nonprofit Donation Pages](#) (203 organizations) and [The State of Email Cultivation](#) (199 organizations) so we were able to compare and contrast Higher Ed organizations to these “Other Nonprofits”.

After reviewing the online giving process and email communications of Higher Ed organizations here were the key, high-level findings.

1. The online giving experience to higher ed organizations has a lot of room to be improved.

82% of Higher Ed organizations scored less than 50% and the average online giving experience score was 40% – compared to Other Nonprofits who scored 59% – and all 3 organization types scored similarly with Large Universities (38%), Small/Liberal Arts (42%), and Community Colleges (42%).

2. The online giving experience to higher ed organizations has significantly more friction than other nonprofits.

Higher Ed organizations were 2.5 times more likely to have 3 or more clear steps in the giving process and 2 times more likely to require non-essential information to complete a gift compared to Other Nonprofits.

3. The majority of higher ed organizations aren't providing a strong reason to give on their donation page.

Only 2 out of 10 Higher Ed organizations provided a strong reason to give on their donation page. A key reason for this is over half of Higher Ed organizations used less than one sentence of copy to communicate to donors why they should give.

4. Few higher ed organizations are prioritizing and focusing on recurring giving.

1 in 10 Higher Ed organizations did not provide an option to make a recurring gift, 9 out of 10 did not provide a reason why someone should make a monthly gift, and 3% defaulted to a monthly gift on their main donation page.

5. Higher Ed organizations are not using their thank you page strategically.

More than half of Higher Ed organizations did not expand on the impact or importance of the donation on the thank you page and 44% provided no next step or action of any kind.

6. Higher ed organizations send very few emails compared to other nonprofits in the first 45 days after a donation.

76% of Higher Ed organizations sent less than 3 emails and the median number of emails sent was 1, compared to 50% of Other Nonprofits and a median of 3.

7. Higher ed organizations can improve their email fundraising strategy and solicitations.

8 out of 10 Higher Ed organizations did not send a solicitation email within 45 days and for those that did, 6 out of 10 had 2 or more calls to action, and 4 out of 10 pointed to a donation page that wasn't congruent with the message in the email.

Introduction

A note from Ray Gary and iDonate

iDonate was founded on the idea that there's no lack of generosity. The giving spirit is alive and well – it's the giving systems that have fallen behind. We set out to connect the two in order to unleash the massive amounts of untapped philanthropy in the United States. When NextAfter approached us about joining them in their efforts to uncover what generosity looks like in higher education, we could not have been more excited. How do these organization build trust with their donors? How does their digital giving help create the sort of fulfilling and reciprocal relationships that we at iDonate already know are so essential to taking philanthropy in the United States to the next level?

We knew NextAfter would bring remarkable insights to these questions, and that their answers would be backed by clear and careful data. We also knew that if we could show these institutions just how much they were missing by not embracing new technology and digital methods of donor engagement, we could help them solve that problem and reach new fundraising heights with more involved donors than ever before.

We sincerely hope you'll find this report interesting, informative and most importantly, actionable. The findings here are full of exciting possibility, and we can't wait to explore it together.

Sincerely,



Raymond J. Gary, Jr.

CEO, *iDonate*

A note from Brady Josephson and NextAfter

When we were discussing the idea of a Higher Ed study with Ray and the iDonate I was both excited... and somewhat fearful. Higher Ed organizations are quite unique, large, and complex and I don't personally have a lot of experience working with, for, and around them. That was the fearful part.

The exciting part was the opportunity. According to Giving USA 2020, Education comprised 14% of all giving which amounted to \$64.1 Billion. Now it should be noted that the vast majority of that comes through mega and large gifts from people with close or direct ties to the institution however. So how online fundraising fits into the bigger picture is a bit of a challenge but also a potentially large opportunity. Add in the distinctive element of Alumni and young alumni engagement in particular and the application of online fundraising optimization becomes very interesting albeit still challenging.

Enter this study where the goal was to:

1. Better understand the current state of online donation pages for Higher Ed organizations and their unique attributes
2. See the online giving experience and subsequent email communications through a donor's eyes
3. Provide ideas and insights for higher ed nonprofits to improve their online giving experience and donor email communications to raise more money online

To achieve this, we put ourselves in the shoes of a donor and made \$20 donations to 105 Higher Ed organizations – 51% Large Universities, 28% Small/Liberal Arts Organizations, and 21% Community Colleges – between February 25, 2020 and February 28, 2020. We started each donation at the organization's homepage and as our "donor's journey" progressed, we answered 38 questions about the giving process and another six about the thank-you page. We then scored each organization, recording positive and negative points based on data available from real experiments that show what helps or hurts online giving. This was also the same methodology used in the

2019 study [The State of Nonprofit Donation Pages](#) where 203 nonprofits from 12 different verticals were analyzed (this is the data behind “Other Nonprofits” for the donation page analysis).

After the donation was made, we monitored the emails we received for 45 days. We classified each of the 223 emails we received by type: confirmation email, cultivation email, or solicitation email. We then looked at email send times, sender, the ratio of cultivation to solicitation emails, and how the three email types were trending over time. This was the same methodology used in the 2019 study [The State of Nonprofit Email Cultivation](#) that included 199 nonprofits across 12 verticals (this is the data behind “Other Nonprofits” for the email analysis).

It should be noted that while our donations were made just before COVID-19 really hit the United States, roughly 30 of the 45 days where we collected and analyzed emails were firmly in “COVID times” and played a role in the communication strategies and therefore our experience and this study.

Thank you in advance for downloading, reading, and sharing this report. I hope you find it useful, applicable, and enlightening.

Good luck!



Brady Josephson

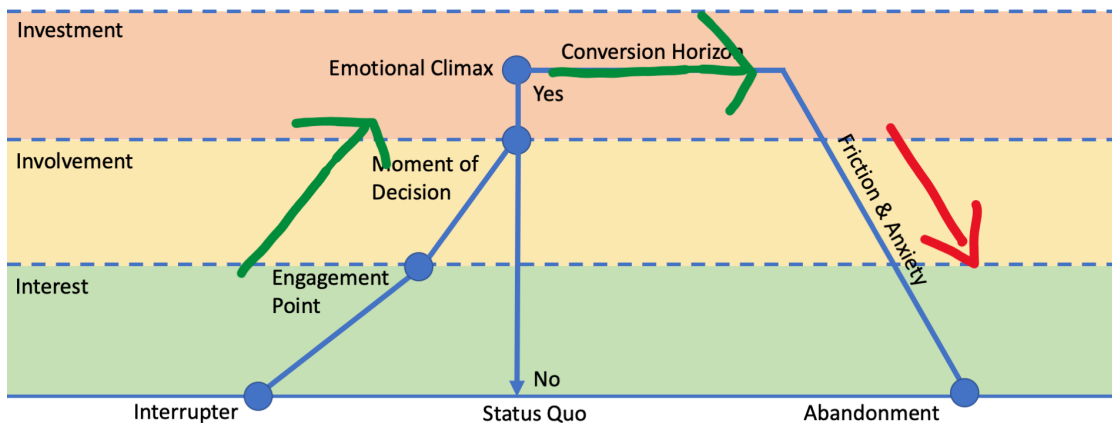
Managing Director, [NextAfter Institute for Online Fundraising](#)
Vice President of Innovation & Optimization, [NextAfter](#)

brady@nextafter.com

The Online Giving Experience

To analyze and score the giving experience we need to understand how and why people give online. We use the Sparkline of a Donation as a framework for the “how” as people move from status quo to interest, involvement, and then investment.

Sparkline of a Donation



People move from an interrupter (an email, an ad, something you heard on the news, etc.) to an engagement point or the donation page itself in this case. This is where there is a critical moment of decision when someone will choose to actually give as opposed to just entertain the idea of giving.

If they choose yes is an emotional climax and depending on how strong that feeling or connection is determines how long the conversion horizon is. The idea here is that there are friction and anxiety factors – parting with money, providing personal and sensitive information, and the sheer number of steps you need to go through – that even if someone has made the decision to give,

they may still abandon the process if these factors outweigh the emotional connection established.

So if this emotional connection is most critical to determining if a gift is made, how can you make sure you build a strong one? Or why do people make that decision? Here's where we use MECLABS' Conversion Heuristic.



$$C = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a$$

CONVERSION	MOTIVATION	VALUE PROPOSITION (CLARITY)	INCENTIVE	FRICITION	ANXIETY
------------	------------	-----------------------------	-----------	-----------	---------

This simply shows that someone's innate motivation or desire to give plays the biggest role in the likelihood of a gift. This is followed by their understanding of the value proposition or how the organization answers this question: **Why should I give to you today as opposed to another organization or not at all?**

That's the main factor in moving an interested donor to an actual donor, but additional incentives can help – matching gifts, deadlines, and social proof to name a few – to increase perceived value. As previously mentioned, there are cost factors to giving as well in the form of friction and anxiety which increase perceived cost.

So why do people give?

When they see more perceived value compared to perceived cost throughout the giving process, not just at one part.

As it relates to this study, we look at the value proposition as well as which incentives are used and provide positive points when organizations use

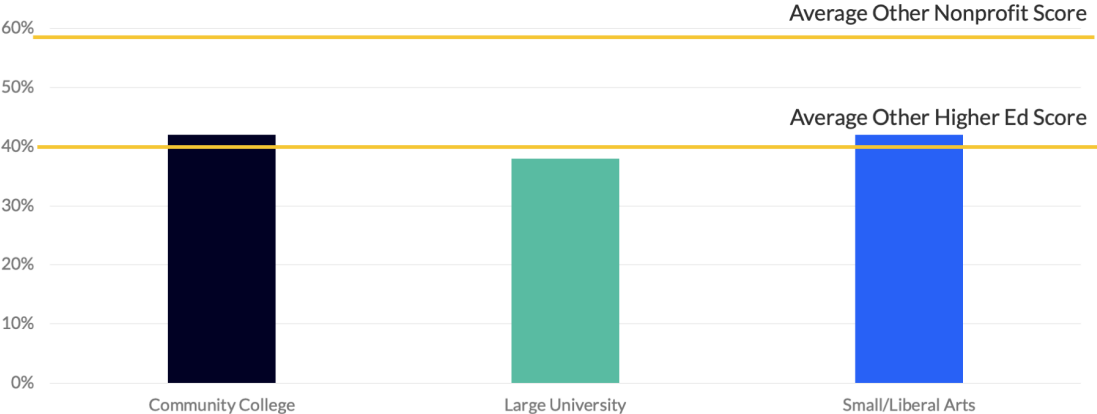
strategies and tactics that we've seen work with other nonprofits through experimentation and testing that help increase giving and generosity. We also ascribe negative points when the opposite is true, organizations provide unnecessary friction or do not adequately address anxiety in the giving process.

Key Findings

Key Finding #1: The online giving experience to Higher Ed organizations has a lot of room to be improved.

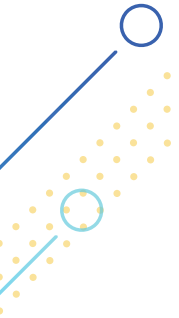
Using these frameworks and applying it to the online giving experience to Higher Ed organizations we found that there is a lot of room for improvement as the average Higher Ed organization scored 18 percentage points lower than their nonprofit peers.

Overall Score for the Higher Ed Online Giving Experience



Not only that but 8 out of 10 Higher Ed organizations in the study scored less than 50% which is significantly higher than Other Nonprofits where only about 3 out of 10 scored under 50%.

But Why?



Key Finding #2: The online giving experience to Higher Ed organizations has significantly more friction than other nonprofits.

Friction in the giving experience is anything that slows a donor down or, even worse, causes them to stop or abandon the process completely. We categorize different types of friction into 7 main types:

1. *Field Number Friction*

2. Field Layout Friction

3. Form Error Friction

4. *Confusion Friction*

5. *Decision Friction*

6. *Device Friction*

7. *Steps Friction*

Bold: We study it

Italic: Worse or much worse compared to other nonprofits.

In our research studies like this one we specifically look at 5 of the types of friction and Higher Ed organizations scored worse or significantly worse in 4 out of those 5.

Field Number Friction

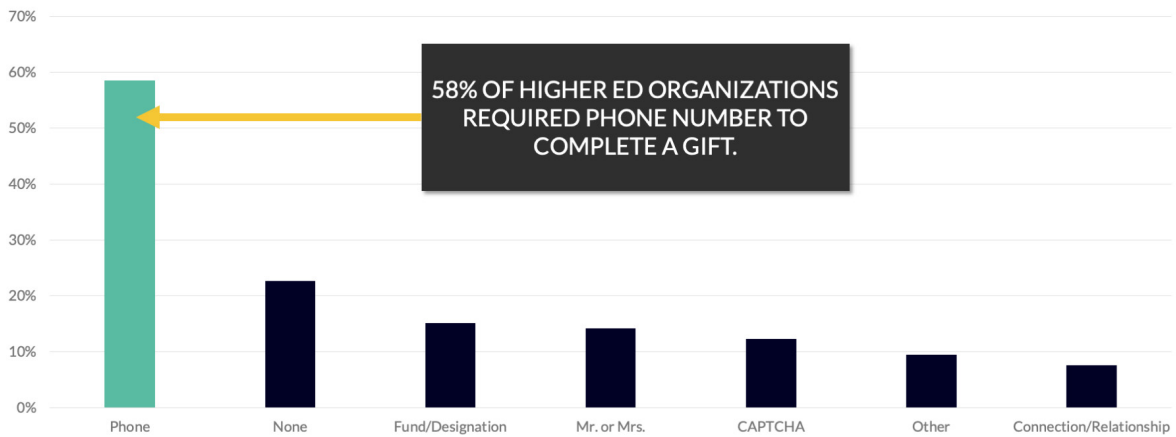
This is the concept that the more form fields you present and the more information you are collecting the greater the chance that someone will abandon the process. This concept is more directly related to required form fields as opposed to optional ones.

For example, [in this experiment, making cell phone a required field to process a donation resulted in a 42.6% decrease in conversation rate](#) and ultimately a 50.6% reduction in revenue. However we've seen no significant difference when the phone field is made optional.

For Higher Ed organizations we found that they were 2 times more likely to require non-essential information in the giving process compared to other nonprofits. Phone number was by far the most required non-essential information with 58% of Higher Ed organizations requiring it (compared to

just 25% of Other Nonprofits) but fund or designation, Title/Mr. Or Mrs., and CAPTCHA were all over 10%.

What nonessential information was required to complete a gift?



Look at these two examples.

Thank you for being a part of our incredible story!

[Secure Transaction](#)

Billing Information	
First Name:	<input type="text"/>
Last Name:	<input type="text"/>
Company Name:	<input type="text"/>
Country:	<input type="text" value="United States"/>
Address:	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>
City:	<input type="text"/>
State/Province:	<input type="text" value="- Select State -"/>
Zip/Postal Code:	<input type="text"/>
Phone Number:	<input type="text"/>
Email Address:	<input type="text"/>



Make a Gift Today



Your gift to Rhodes helps provide the resources to support a new generation of outstanding students and the work of a superior faculty. Please send your gift or pledge payment by completing this form.

The information you enter will be encrypted and sent as a secure transmission.

Personal Information		
First Name *	Middle/Former Name	Last Name *
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Email address *	Class Year	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Alumnus, Alumna, or Student <input type="radio"/> Parent <input type="radio"/> Faculty or Staff <input type="radio"/> Friend
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Spouse First Name	Spouse Middle/Former	Spouse Last Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Email address	Class Year	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Alumnus, Alumna, or Student <input type="radio"/> Parent <input type="radio"/> Faculty or Staff <input type="radio"/> Friend
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Street Address *	City *	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
State *	Zip Code *	Country *
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="United States"/>

The first one required a phone number — a non-essential piece of information to process a gift — but in the second one, even though they didn't require unnecessary information, you can see how all the extra optional fields — like Spouse's First, Middle, and Last Name — feels like extra work. This adds to the perceived cost and can still contribute to donation abandonment.

This is an example of **Field Layout Friction** where how the fields are layed out, even if no additional information is required, can impact conversion rate.

[In this experiment just by housing more horizontal space and grouped form fields they saw a 39.4% increase in donations.](#)

Form Field and Form Layout Friction work together as if you have more fields — required or otherwise — it makes it more difficult to lay them out in a way where it looks and feels like less work to the donor.

Confusion Friction

This is when things like navigation elements, multiple calls-to-action, or insider language clouds the donor's mind or, worse, leads them away from a donation.

We've seen time and again that removing navigation links in the header, eliminating links taking you away from the donation page, and designing a page that focuses simply on completing a donation helps increase donations.

[In this example, they addressed all three of the above in a radical redesign and saw a 44.8% increase in conversion rate.](#)

For Higher Ed organizations, 64% had distracting links on their pages and 43% had multiple calls to action (besides donate) which was higher than Other Nonprofits (55% and 38% respectively).

You can see on this example all the links available that take you away from the giving flow.

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

Give to UH

Why Give? Areas to Support Get Involved News & Events

UH Home > Giving > Give to UH

MAKE A GIFT

UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

221 E. Cullen Bldg.
Houston, Texas 77204-2013
Phone: (713) 743-4708
Toll free: (877) 755-0559
Fax: (713) 743-0946
E-mail: development@uh.edu

For a Cougar Pride update regarding the new tax reform, please visit:
<http://www.uhcougars.com/sports/cougar-pride/spec-rel/012618aab.html>

To mail in your pledge, please use the link below:
Printable pledge form [\(PDF\)](#)

Here, We Go | Colleges and Programs | Search Funds | UHAA | Life Membership

For online giving support or questions regarding alternate giving methods, please call 713-743-4708 / Monday - Friday 8am - 5pm CT

Support Here, We Go: The Campaign for the University of Houston

Here, We Go Campaign Fund \$

+ Add Gift

Donation Details

Total gift amount:
\$

* Frequency:
One time

Next

Information provided on this form will be used by University Advancement for the purpose of crediting you correctly for your gift. Personal information contained in University Advancement's records is used only for university business. We are committed to protecting your privacy. Our secure server software (SSL) is the industry standard and among the best software available today for secure commerce transactions.

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

University of Houston
Houston, Texas 77204
(713) 743-2255

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Academic Calendar | Get Help | Social Media
Campus Carry Policy | Human Resources | Title IX — Sexual Misconduct
Campus Map | Library | Texas Veterans Portal
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While these additional links can seem innocuous, it can lead to distraction and confusion for donors leading to donation abandonment.

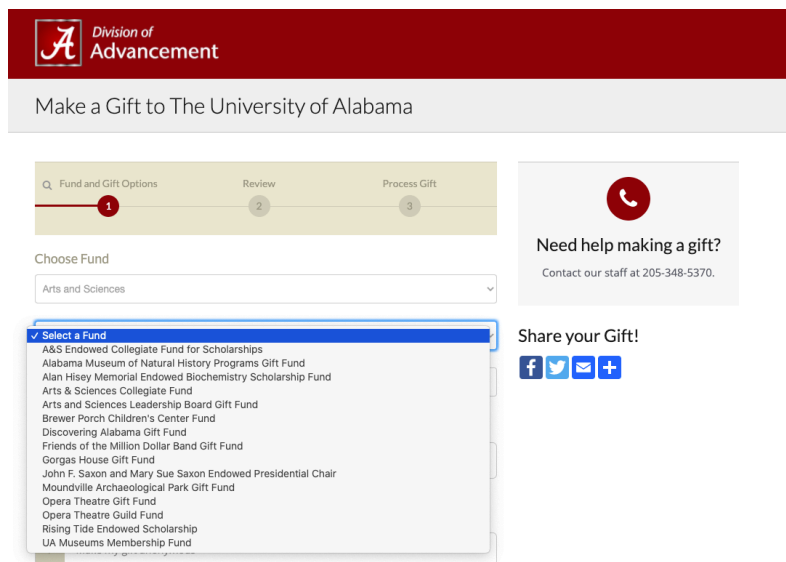
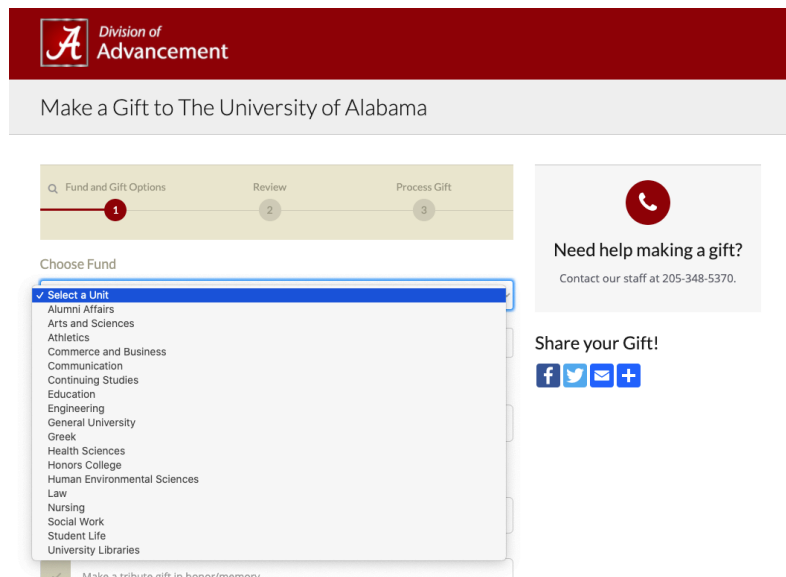
Decision Friction

This is closely related to confusion friction but occurs when donors are asked to make too many decisions, choose between equally weighted or among too many options, or make unexpected decisions.

Limiting those decisions or making it easier for donors can therefore help increase donations. [In this experiment, prioritizing one child available to sponsor as opposed to rows of three equally weighted children helped increase conversion 11.2%.](#) Or a different example of the same concept where [in this case, adding some social proof to the pre-selected donation amount increased conversion rate 7.8% and average gift 14.9% leading to a 23.8% increase in revenue.](#)

For Higher Ed organizations, one of the biggest areas of decision friction was with designating donations to different funds. 15% of organizations in the study required a gift designation – this also brings in field number friction as well – but very rarely was this decision presented in a helpful way to the donor. In the confusion friction example earlier you can see they used a tabbed layout with different options like “Here, We Go”, “UHAA”, and “Life Membership” which offer little clarity as to why someone should select those tabs or what to do once they have.

Most often however, it was just a big drop down of options and many times had a sub-fund as well as seen in this example.



Choosing from drop downs with dozens of options is daunting, even if you knew where you were hoping to give, but if you didn't it can be downright scary.

A few Higher Ed organizations pre-selected an option or defaulted to Where Most Needed as seen here which could help ease the decision friction in the giving process.

The screenshot shows the SBCC Foundation donation page. At the top, there is a header with the SBCC logo and the text "FOUNDATION SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE". Below this is a photo of three graduates and the slogan "Your gift makes it possible." The main heading is "Make a Donation". The text explains that gifts of all sizes make a difference and that donors of \$1,000 or more are invited to join the "President's Circle". A progress bar shows three steps: "STEP ONE ENTER INFO", "STEP TWO CONFIRMATION", and "STEP THREE RECEIPT". The donation amount is selected as "\$500" from a grid of options: \$5,000, \$2,500, \$1,000, \$500, \$250, \$100, \$50, and \$25. Below this is a field for "Other Gift Amount" set to "\$0.00". A "CHOOSE A FREQUENCY" section shows "Recurring Frequency" set to "One Time". At the bottom, a "Donation Designation" dropdown menu is pre-selected with "Use my donation where it is needed most". There is also a field for "Other gift instructions" and a small note: "* Please note if you are donating to the SB Support Network *".

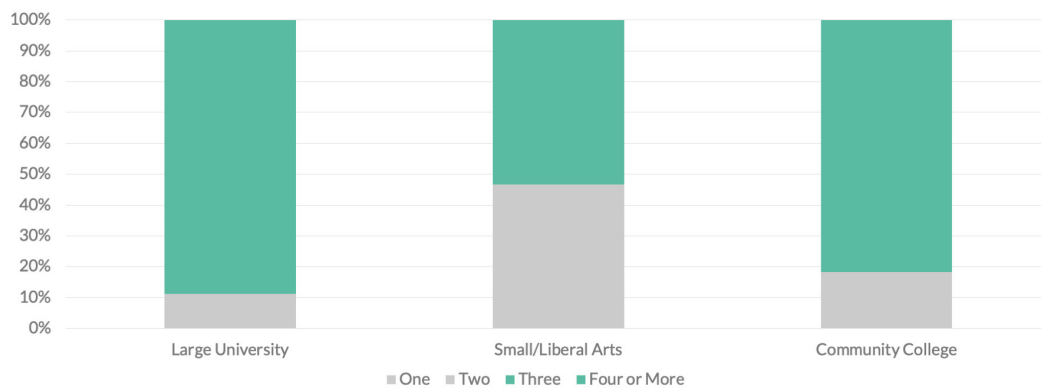
Steps Friction

This is the idea that the more steps there are in the giving process — we define steps as full page loads as opposed to just pure clicks — the chance of abandonment goes up. This is partly due to increased confusion friction as when you complete a step and have more to go, without context or knowing there are multiple steps in particular, it can be confusing and frustrating.

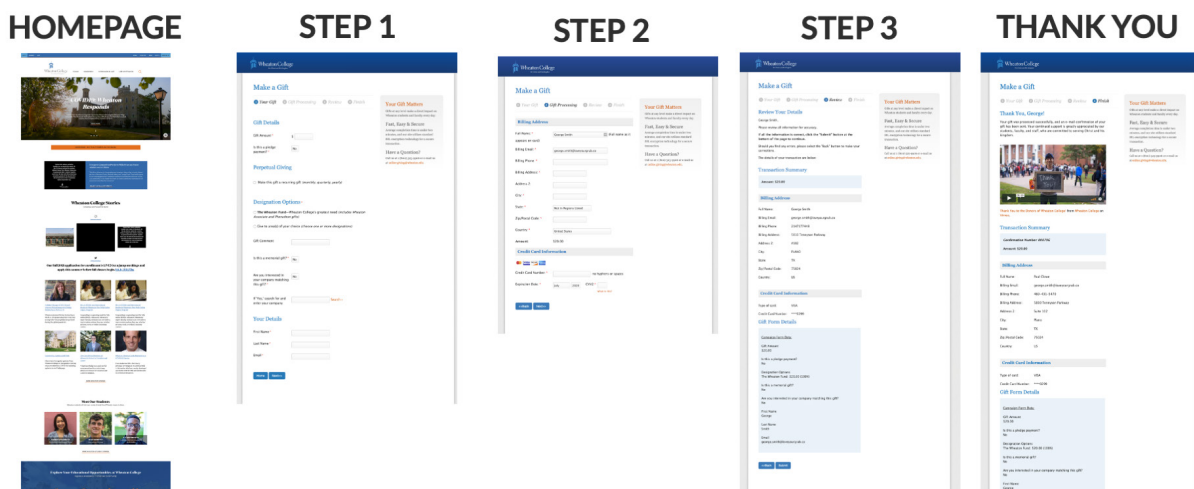
There are often some unnecessary steps in a giving process such as verification pages before completing a donation. [In this experiment, just by removing that page, the organization saw a 176% increase in donations.](#)

For Higher Ed organizations, 77% had 3 or more steps to complete a donation and 8 out of 10 Large Universities and 8 out of 10 Small/Liberal Arts organizations had 3 or more steps compared to just 5 out of 10 Community Colleges.

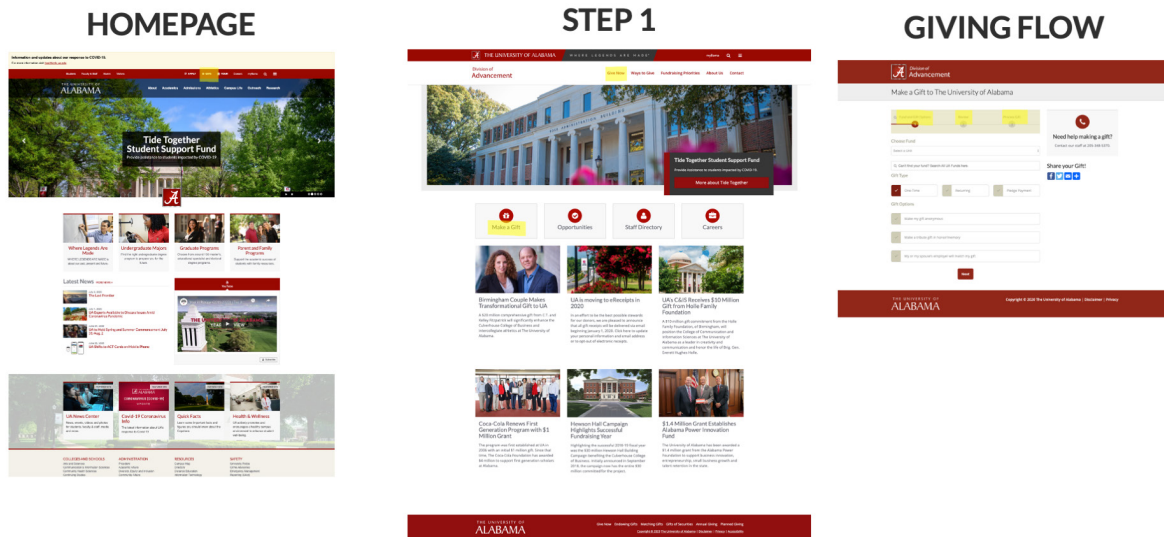
89% Large University's Had 3 Or More Steps Compared To 53% Of Small/Liberal Arts Organizations And 82% Of Community Colleges.



Here's an example of a Small/Liberal Arts organization that had a 3 step process to make a donation (not counting the homepage) because of the verification page:



For Large Universities, there was often a foundation or giving microsite step in between the homepage and the donation flow like this:



In the last example, you may have noticed that it is the same organization that had a required dropdown and sub-fund dropdown but you can also see that they have a 3 step giving process with a verification page as well.

This is a good (or bad) example of how these different friction elements don't operate in isolation but instead work together (for better or worse). Having a required dropdown may not in and of itself cause crater itself crater conversion rates, but when it's on Step 2 of 4 or 5 its negative impact is greater.

This is particularly true for **Device Friction** which is when the giving experience is poor or not optimized for a mobile device or tablet (not pinching and zooming is a very low bar but the starting point). Although we found 96% of Higher Ed organizations had a mobile responsive giving experience – which is generally a good thing – the aforementioned friction factors can actually feel worse when on a mobile device or tablet. Choosing from dozens of fund options in a drop down is bad enough, but try doing it on a mobile phone or going through 3 or more steps in different windows.

[In this experiment, the organization addressed different friction factors like confusion \(removed navigation\), decision \(simplified gift array\), and form field](#)

and layout (reduced and used horizontal space) and saw an 18.4% increase in donations. But those changes led to a 64.3% increase on mobile devices!



Key Finding #3: The majority of Higher Ed organizations aren't providing a strong reason to give on their donation page.

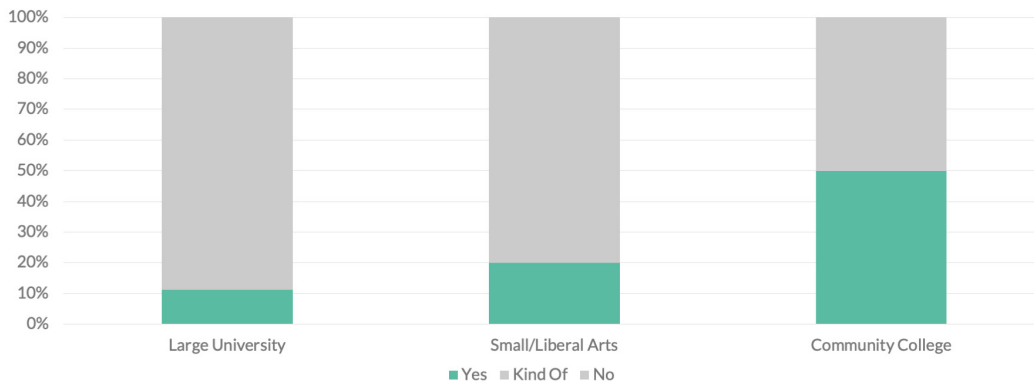
Friction is a cost factor and, generally speaking, by reducing it you can fairly easily improve online giving. But reducing friction, while often easier, isn't the most important factor in getting more online gifts. That's the message, the offer, or the value proposition. And for Higher Ed organizations when it comes to their messaging, we found there is a lot to be desired.

The key question that needs to be answered in the mind of the donor is this: **Why should I give to you today as opposed to another organization or not at all?** To answer that question, we look at four different factors:

1. **Appeal** Do you want it? How much?
2. **Exclusivity** Can you get it anywhere else? How so?
3. **Clarity** Do you understand it? Easily? Quickly?
4. **Credibility** Do you believe it? Why? Says who?

Looking through that lens at the giving experience of Higher Ed organizations, we found that only 22% had a "strong" reason to give. Large Universities were the worst in this area with only 11% having a "strong" reason to give. Small/ Liberal Arts organizations were almost twice as good, 20%, but still paled in comparison to Other Nonprofits, 33%, and to Community Colleges, 50%.

Do they have a strong value proposition where they try to answer why you should give to them compared to another organization or not at all



But why did Higher Ed organizations – Large Universities and Small/Liberal Arts organizations in particular – score so poorly?

The main reason is that they didn't even really try. 54% of Higher Ed organizations used less than 1 sentence of copy on their donation page.

Remember the confusion friction example? Unless you've 100% made up your mind to give, why would you choose to give to that organization? Or even if you did, does that make you want to be more generous?

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON Login to AccessUH Give to UH Search

Give to UH

Why Give? Areas to Support Get Involved News & Events

UH Home > Giving > Give to UH

MAKE A GIFT

UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT
 221 E. Cullen Bldg.
 Houston, Texas 77204-2013
 Phone: (713) 743-4708
 Toll free: (877) 755-0559
 Fax: (713) 743-0946
 E-mail: development@uh.edu

For a Cougar Pride update regarding the new tax reform, please visit:
<http://www.uhcougars.com/sports/cougar-pride/spec-rel/012618aab.html>

To mail in your pledge, please use the link below:
 Printable pledge form [\(PDF\)](#)

Here, We Go | Colleges and Programs | Search Funds | UHAA | Life Membership

For online giving support or questions regarding alternate giving methods, please call 713-743-4708 / Monday - Friday 8am - 5pm CT

Support Here, We Go: The Campaign for the University of Houston

Here, We Go Campaign Fund \$

+ Add Gift

Donation Details

Total gift amount:
 \$

* Frequency:
 One time

Next

Information provided on this form will be used by University Advancement for the purpose of crediting you correctly for your gift. Personal information contained in University Advancement's records is used only for university business. We are committed to protecting your privacy. Our secure server software (SSL) is the industry standard and among the best software available today for secure commerce transactions.

The message or how you answer that key value proposition question is the main reason why people give and how much they give, so if you aren't using any messaging you are leaving money and opportunity on the table.

Consider [this experiment where just by adding 4 or 5 short paragraphs – yes, paragraphs – the organization saw a 150% increase in donations](#). Or [this experiment where one line of copy under the donate button at the very end of the giving process still helped increase donations 42.1%](#)!

And even when some copy was used, was it appealing? Exclusive? Clear? Credible?

Look at the example on the right from the Small/Liberal Arts organization we used in the steps friction section earlier and compare it to this example:

Your Gift Matters

Gifts at any level make a direct impact on Wheaton students and faculty every day.

Fast, Easy & Secure

Average completion time is under two minutes, and our site utilizes standard SSL encryption technology for a secure transaction.

Have a Question?

Call us at 1 (800) 525-9906 or e-mail us at online.giving@wheaton.edu.



The world needs biblical truth now more than ever.

We live in a world desperately searching for truth. Each day, people direct their lives based on cultural pressure and popular opinion, rather than the unfailing truth found in God's Word.

For more than 90 years, Dallas Theological Seminary has equipped servant-leaders to proclaim the Gospel and build up the body of Christ around the world. DTS professors use the entire Bible as the central course of study—and it does not return void!



"My greatest fear for our church, or any church, for that matter, is erosion. Theology gives any ministry its solidity. My training in theology at Dallas Seminary has been invaluable to me!"

—Chuck Swindoll, DTS Chancellor & Pastor of Stonebriar Community Church, Frisco, TX

DTS Teaches the Whole Bible

More than 15,000 alumni now preach, teach, and live out the Gospel throughout the world.

Help teach the Bible to a world that needs it. Make your gift to DTS today.

You may not agree with the message but you have to agree it is much more clear as to why a donation is needed and what kind of impact it will have. To answer the key value proposition question in the mind of the donor, you most likely need to use not just copy, but a bit more copy than you think. That's something Community Colleges were 5 times more likely to do compared to Large Universities and 4 times more likely than Small/Liberal Arts organizations and largely why they scored better in this area.



Key Finding #4: Few Higher Ed organizations are prioritizing and focusing on recurring giving.

When looking at how Higher Ed organizations were encouraging people to give, we observed that not many organizations were placing a lot of emphasis or focus on recurring giving. Further, 1 out of 10 Higher Ed organizations did not accept recurring gifts at all and 9 out of 10 didn't give any specific reason why someone should make a recurring gift.

If you look back through this report at the different donation page examples already shared, you can see what we saw: where if there was an option to make a recurring gift it was just a checkbox or button with something like "Recurring Gift" (which actually was the commonly used text next to the recurring gift button/box).

Again, if copy or message is the most important factor to drive donations, using none of it leaves the decision entirely up to the donor. And we've seen that it doesn't have to be a crazy amount of copy as [in this experiment, the organization added a Did You Know? Section with a short paragraph talking about monthly giving and saw a 48.4% increase in recurring donors from new visitors and no negative impact on one-time donation rates.](#)

This example from a Large University was 1 of the 10 who took some time to talk about the value of monthly giving. And when it came time to choose donation type, they were just 1 of 3 organizations who defaulted to a recurring gift, which isn't necessarily a good or bad thing but shows emphasis on recurring giving.

OSU.EDU Help BuckeyeLink Map Find People Webmail

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Contact us | View My Account

Why give How to give Support your passion Support a college or campus Don

Make a gift

Frequency:

Monthly One-time

Select a gift amount:

\$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$250

Enter custom amount:

\$

GIVE TODAY

Together, we move forward.

Time and Change: The Ohio State Campaign is your opportunity to support that vital power that lives within all of us — the power of human potential.



Monthly giving goes further

You can support life-changing scholarships, programs, research, patient care and more all year long.

It's safe, secure, easy — and it does a lot. Plus, once you enroll, you never have to think about it again. Monthly giving provides dependable support with less administrative costs, and a dedicated personal contact is always available to assist you with your questions or updates.

So support what you're passionate about at Ohio State all year long, and set up a monthly gift today.

Make a monthly gift



\$10 a month
provides 30 meals a year for a student in need.
GIVE TODAY



\$50 a month
covers the cost of clippers our veterinary students use to prepare shelter animals for surgery.
GIVE TODAY



\$100 a month
keeps research into advanced cancer treatments moving forward at our Comprehensive Cancer Center.
GIVE TODAY

When we compare Higher Ed organizations to Other Nonprofits, these are similar in terms of not accepting a recurring gift (10%) and not having a reason to give monthly (93%) while being 3 times less likely to default to a monthly gift (11%). So this isn't necessarily unique to Higher Ed organizations but with the immense value of recurring donors to nonprofits — the Target Analytics donorCentrics Sustainer Summit in 2017 showed recurring donors were almost 4 times more valuable than one-time donors for large organizations and 10

- 11 times more valuable for small and medium sized organizations – and adoption of all age demographics (including the coveted ‘young alumni’) we were surprised to see such limited emphasis on recurring giving.

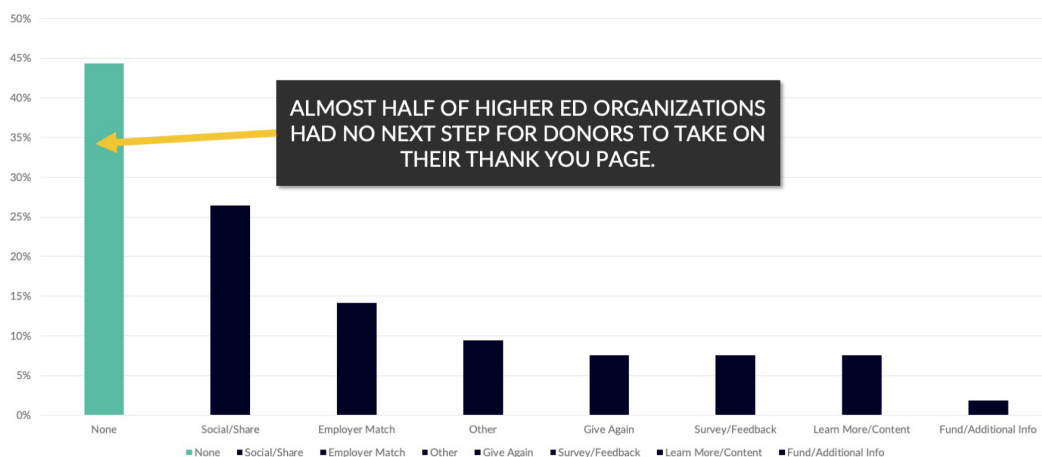
This is also an example of “just because everyone is doing doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s good.”

So those were some of the key findings as it relates to making the donation itself, but what happened after we gave? What did we see?

Key Finding #5: Higher Ed organizations are not using their thank you page strategically.

The end of the donation process is the beginning of the engagement process and can plant the seeds that lead to a next gift or different type of involvement. But with half of Higher Ed organizations not thanking donors in a meaningful way – with messaging that says more than ‘thank you’ – and 44% not offering any additional action to take, it seems that Higher Ed organizations are not using their thank you page strategically.

If there is a next step or action for you to take, what is it?



The most common next step provided was a social share or social media connection (26%) followed by an ask to see if an employer would match the

gift (14%). 8% asked for feedback or offered a survey and just 2% asked for gift designation or more information about the gift. Due to the unique complexity of Higher Ed organizations and the multitude of funds, asking for more information – specifically related to the gift use and designation – could be a real opportunity.

BecauseHamilton OUR CAMPAIGN →

Hamilton Alumni · Parents · Athletics · News · Events · Directories · My Hamilton

ABOUT ADMISSION ACADEMICS CAMPUS LIFE AFTER HAMILTON

HOME → MAKE A GIFT

SUPPORT HAMILTON

Thank you for your gift to Hamilton College. Your support enables us to keep [our promise](#) to successive generations of Hamilton students and ensure the College can admit the most talented students.

Your card has been charged, and a receipt has been sent to george.smith@loveyourgrub.co.

GIFT DESIGNATION

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Hamilton's decision to adopt a need-blind admission policy. To celebrate a decade of making a Hamilton education accessible to the best possible students regardless of financial means, all gifts to the 2019-20 Hamilton Fund will be directed to student financial assistance unless otherwise specified.

FINANCIAL AID

OTHER PURPOSE

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

BECAUSE OF HAMILTON, I ... (PLEASE SHARE HOW THE COLLEGE MADE YOU THE PERSON YOU ARE TODAY. YOUR BRIEF COMMENT WILL APPEAR ON OUR CAMPAIGN WEBSITE.)

Maximize your gift by applying for an employer match. [Check to see](#) if you or your spouse/partner are eligible for a matching donation.

MAIL ME A WRITTEN RECEIPT.

SUBMIT

CONTACT INFORMATION

Fred Rogers P'21
Director of Annual Giving
315-859-4640
giving@hamilton.edu

Hamilton 198 College Hill Road, Clinton, NY 13323 315-859-4011

MAPS & DIRECTIONS ARTS/MUSEUM LIBRARY & IT THE SCROLL JOBS OFFICES & SERVICES GDPR & PRIVACY

MAKE A GIFT

In the example above, you can see how this Small/Liberal Arts organization thanked the donor, extended the message with what the donation will do and confirmed the donation with contact information immediately.

Then they offer you the opportunity to designate your gift with a bit more context and less pressure since the donation has already been completed.

They also offer the donor the chance to share more about their donation before a call to action to see about matching donations.

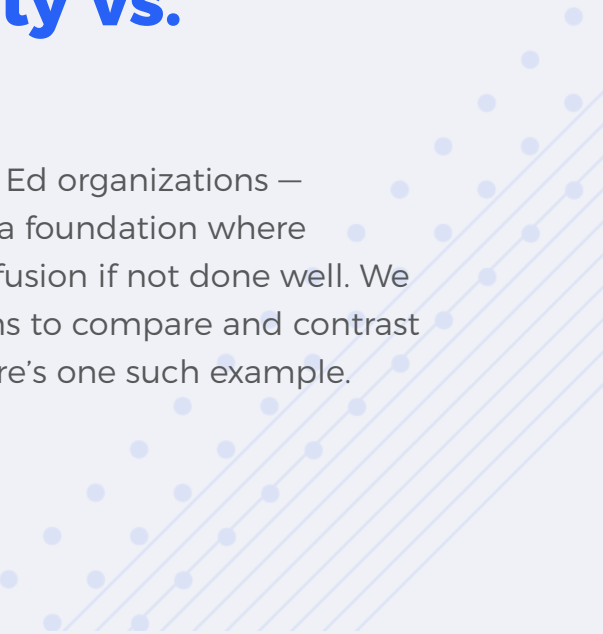
Something they did not do, and very few Higher Ed organizations did – very few Other Nonprofits did as well for that matter – was ask for a 2nd gift or upgrade to a recurring donation (8%). This may seem counterintuitive, but as seen [in this experiment, just over 5% of people immediately upgraded to a recurring gift and almost 29% of people made an additional one-time gift when asked immediately after their first donation.](#)

8% offered more content to read or watch to learn more and 9% offered something else which, while maybe not specifically designed to increase funding in the short-term, still attempts to engage with the donor while they are present on the website and engaged. Something all organizations – Higher Ed or otherwise – should be contemplating how to do better.



A Deeper Look: University vs. University Foundation

As mentioned, one of the unique things with Higher Ed organizations – particularly Large Universities – was the presence of a foundation where donors were directed to. This can add steps and confusion if not done well. We made a few donations to Large University foundations to compare and contrast the giving experience on a more anecdotal basis. Here's one such example.



Observations

Distractions
vs.
no distractions

Same value
proposition
message

Gift array
(with pre-selected amount)
vs. no array

Same monthly
message
(different
location)

Pre-selected fund
vs.
choose your fund

Same information for
form (different design)

Same credit card form
(different heading and design)

Both use CAPTCHA (with text)

Submit
vs.
Submit Gift

Both have security
text under button

Additional links vs. none

Online Giving Experience Key Findings

1. The online giving experience to higher ed organizations has a lot of room to be improved.
2. The online giving experience to higher ed organizations has significantly more friction than other nonprofits.
3. The majority of higher ed organizations aren't providing a strong reason to give on their donation page.
4. Few higher ed organizations are prioritizing and focusing on recurring giving.
5. There may be an opportunity to use the thank you page more strategically.

Here were some of the higher performing organizations in each category:

Large University

- Southern Methodist University
- University of Wisconsin Foundation
- Ohio State University
- University of Chicago
- Texas Christian University

Small/Liberal Arts

- Hillsdale College
- Dallas Theological Seminary
- Concordia University
- Hamilton College
- St. Olaf College

Community College

- Victor Valley College
- Santa Barbara City College
- Saint Paul College
- Brazosport College
- Maryland Community College



The Email Communication Experience

Email Timing and Classification

In our work and research, we've found that a near universal truth is that the more (quality) emails you send to the more (engaged) people the more money you raise online. While email response rates tend to be low — [M + R Benchmark has it at 0.05%](#) — it still drives the bulk of online fundraising. In our [3 Essential Metrics for Online Fundraising study](#) looking at online fundraising data from 155 nonprofits, we found that it is the largest channel source of online revenue. This is largely due to its significantly superior conversion rate compared to other channels and strong average gift.

But email fundraising isn't just about asking for money. How donors are thanked, reported to, updated and informed — “cultivated” — via email also plays a critical role in driving revenue. [In this experiment, the organization sent an additional cultivation email, each week, for 6 months \(that was the only difference between the control and the treatment\) and saw a 41.5% increase in giving.](#) They also saw a 43% increase in “engagement” — clicks and opens — in all segments (non-donors, active donors, and lapsed donors).

For this study, we wanted to look not just at Higher Ed “solicitation” emails — those that ask for money in some way — but how they were acknowledging a donation (“confirmation”) and using email to engage new donors (“cultivation”).

To do this, we tracked all the emails received from each Higher Ed organization for 45 days and then classified each email as confirmation, solicitation, or cultivation as mentioned above (*NOTE: You can find more detailed classification guidelines in the Methodology and Study Details section at the end of this report.*)

We used a 45 day timeframe for email analysis for a few reasons:

1. The first few emails you send a new donor or subscriber are some of the most read, opened, and engaged emails you'll ever send
2. The most likely time for a 2nd gift – outside of their anniversary date – or an upgrade to recurring gift is within this 2 to 6 week time period
3. It allows for a full monthly cycle of communications

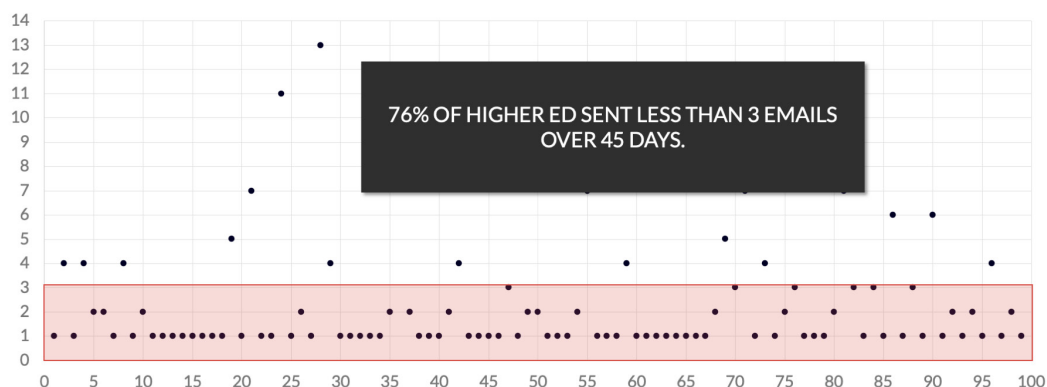
Knowing email communications – not just fundraising emails – are critical to online fundraising and especially crucial in this 45 day time period after a donation. Here were our main takeaways.

Key Findings

Key Finding #6: Higher Ed organizations send very few emails compared to other nonprofits in the first 45 days after a donation.

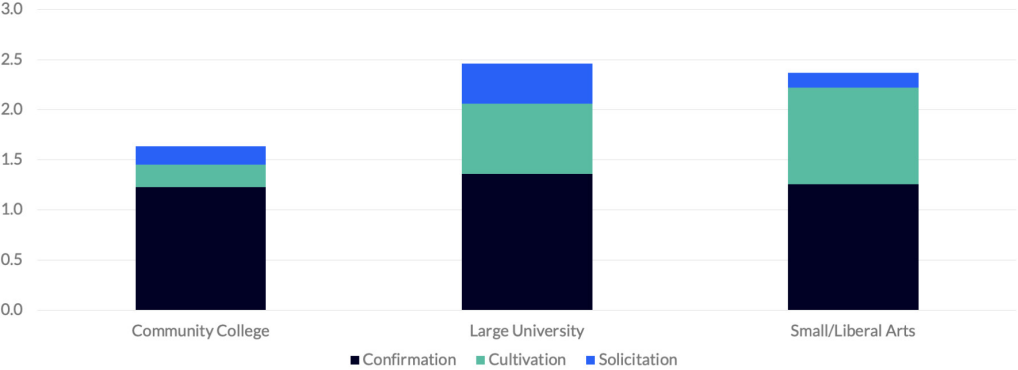
The median number of emails sent by Higher Ed organizations within the first 45 days after a donation was 1 (for Other Nonprofits, it was 3). In fact, over half (55%) of organizations in the study sent us exactly 1 email (most often the confirmation email) and just 24% of Higher Ed organizations sent more than 3 emails (compared to 50% of Other Nonprofits).

Email Volume by Organization



We did observe a slight difference in email volume between Community Colleges compared to Large Universities and Small/Liberal Arts organizations, and that Large Universities were more likely to send solicitation emails.

Email Volume by Type and Organization Type



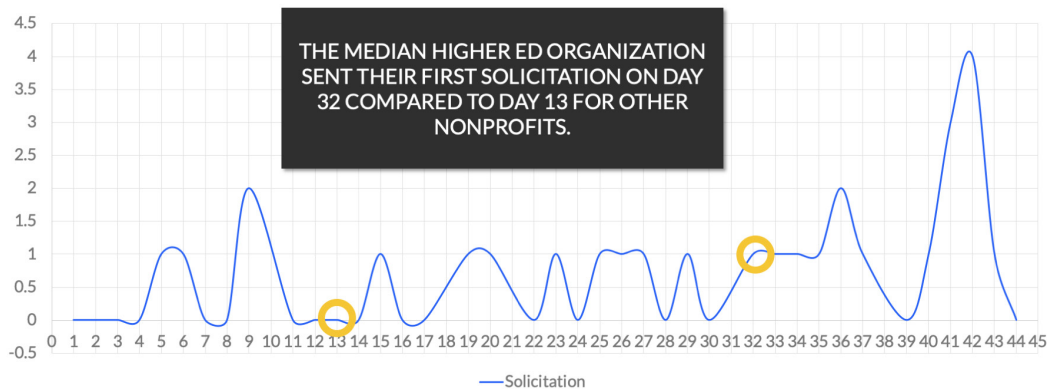
We wondered if the impact of COVID-19 may have played a role, but we saw Higher Ed organizations increase their email non-confirmation email communications by 86% after the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic as opposed to before. That was higher than the increase we saw in other industries, but the general trend is that COVID-19 actually increased email volume so our experience may have actually been higher than during a normal 45 day period.

Because the email volume is so low, any deeper analysis on a more significant and reliable basis is impossible. Therefore, this is the only significant key finding we can provide based on volume. Related, the stats and findings found at the end of this report should be treated as interesting insights as opposed to legitimate trends and key findings.

Key Finding #7: Higher Ed organizations can improve their email fundraising strategy and solicitations.

With less volume to analyze and draw insights from we decided to dive deeper and look at the 1st email solicitation we received. The first insight here is that 78% of Higher Ed organizations did not send us a solicitation email within 45 days (compared to 55% of Other Nonprofits). And when they did, on average it came 19 days later than when Other Nonprofits sent theirs.

Solicitation Emails Received by Day



We need to note that the following, more in-depth analysis is only based on 15 different email solicitations which is just 14% of our sample which, again, is not a reliable source for trends. But by looking at each email in more depth, we can see some patterns and areas of improvement.

Email research done by Limus and Fluent found that who an email was from - the sender - was the most important factor for getting an email open, even more than the subject line. And in our applied research we've often seen that an individual sender, as opposed to an organization, can lead to more opens ([like in this experiment where they saw a 27.5% increase in opens](#)).

When it comes to Higher Ed solicitation emails, we found that 67% of emails were sent from the organization (as opposed to a person only, or a person, organization) which was less likely than all Higher Ed emails (80%) and Other Nonprofits (74%).

☆	Victor Valley Colle.	Inbox	Higher Ed	COVID-19: How YOU can help! - Victor Valley College Foundation family, Even during unprecedented times, you're changing lives for the better... Your generous contribut...	Apr 22
☆	Bruce McPheron, Exe.	Inbox	Higher Ed	Our Buckeyes need your help! - The Ohio State University Office of Academic Affairs Bruce A. McPheron, PhD Executive Vice President and Provost My Fellow Buckeye...	Apr 9
☆	Chancellor Patrick .	Inbox	Higher Ed	Doing our Part: Pitt's COVID-19 Response - Learn how the Pitt Community is responding to COVID-19 View in browser Dear Members of the University Community, In th...	Apr 7
☆	KCC Foundation	Inbox	Higher Ed	KCC COVID-19 Student Emergency Relief Fund - Dear Friend of Kingsborough, I hope this message finds you and your loved ones healthy and safe during this unsettlin...	Apr 6
☆	Brazosport College . 2	Inbox	Higher Ed	Multi-Ch./Online Persona COVID-19 Emergency Aid Funding - Brazosport College launches COVID-19 emergency aid fund COVID-19 Emergency Aid Funding In an effort ...	Apr 6
☆	Carl Stockton	Inbox	Higher Ed	AUM students need us - We do know that many of you are hurting right now as the result of business closures and the unexpected loss of income streams. Dear Mr. S...	Apr 2
☆	Westmont College	Inbox	Higher Ed	Westmont Receives \$50,000 Matching Gift toward COVID-19 Emergency Relief - Your gift to Westmont's COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund meets significant unplanned ...	Mar 31
☆	Office of the Presi.	Inbox	Higher Ed	USC President Carol L. Folt: A Video Message - Join USC in helping those impacted by COVID-19. To view this email as a web page, go here. President Folt's video mes...	Mar 30
☆	The UCF Fund	Inbox	Higher Ed	Emergency relief for our UCF community - Resources for those able to assist Knights impacted by COVID-19 University of Central Florida Knights, As our UCF communi...	Mar 24
☆	University of Nebra.	Inbox	Higher Ed	If you're able, please support University of Nebraska students. - Your support makes a difference. Thank you for your gift. Is this email not displaying correctly? View it L...	Mar 23
☆	Mike Richey	Inbox	Higher Ed	A Call to Action - A Call to Action Dear Big Blue family, During this unparalleled and challenging time, I know you have received many communications about the change...	Mar 20
☆	Portland State Univ.	Inbox	Higher Ed	Reaching out about COVID-19 - Dear George, This is an extraordinary time, and I wanted to take a moment to reach out to all in our donor community. We know that eve...	Mar 18
☆	Peter Standgren	Inbox	Higher Ed	Emergency Relief for UC Family - University of Cincinnati In recent days, we have heard from many members of the UC community asking how they can be of service to ...	Mar 17
☆	CU Denver Advanceme.	Inbox	Higher Ed	Support students during COVID-19 - The Loving Lynx Emergency Fund is available to students facing crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. To view this email as a web ...	Mar 13
☆	Santa Clara Univers.	Inbox	Higher Ed	Tomorrow, what will you Go All In for? - Tomorrow is a day for BIG things! Get ready to Go All In! Tomorrow Broncos from around the world will lock arms for an entire d...	Mar 3

Sent from Organization

Sent from Person, Organization

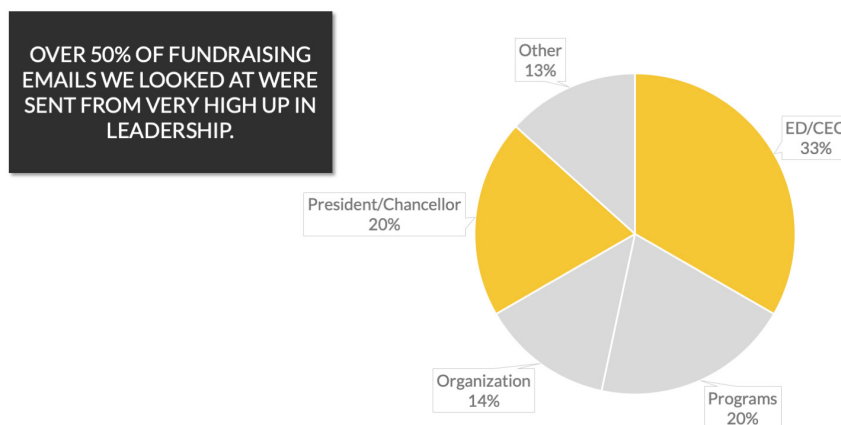
Sent from Person

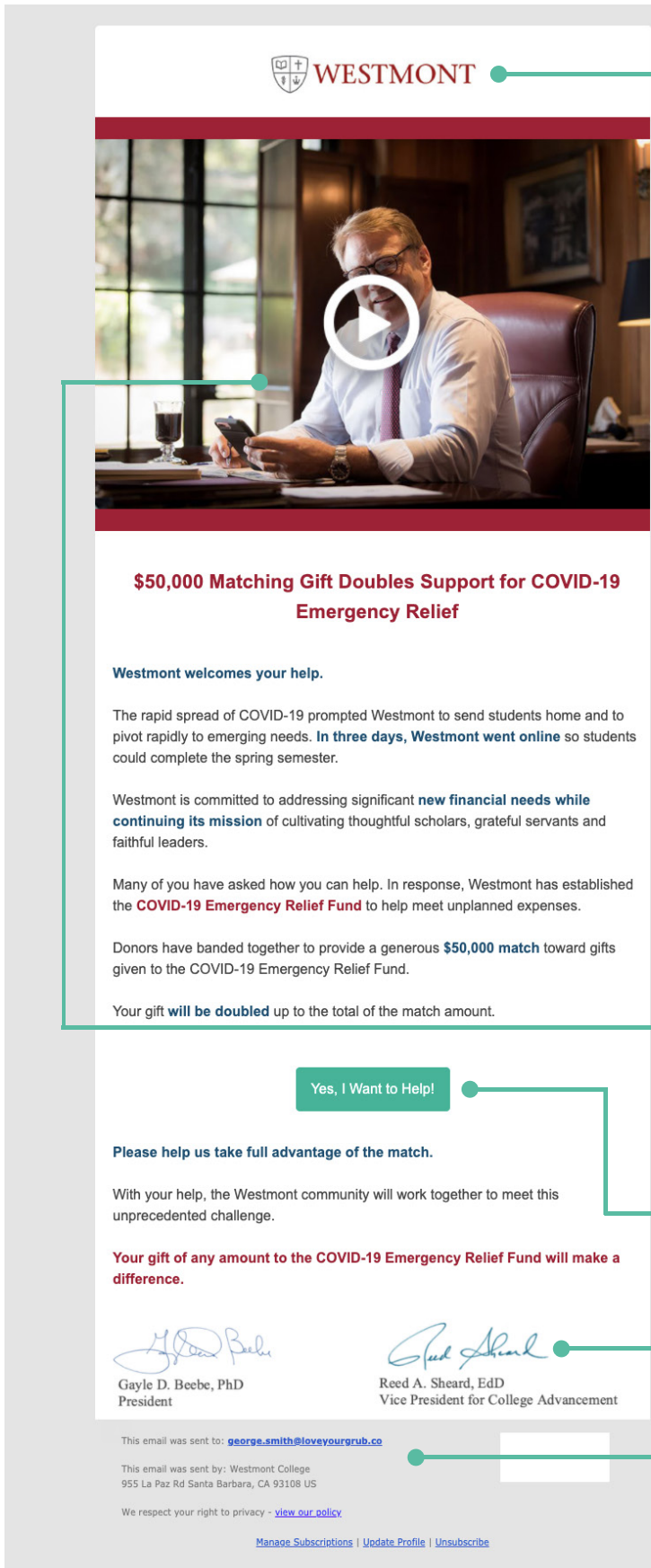
The difference between all emails and solicitations hints that Higher Ed organizations are more likely to take a personal approach in their solicitations compared to other emails. But who were those emails actually from?

If the sender is crucial to opens then who the sender is or who the email is from is also key, something we saw [in this experiment where sending from a Vice President as opposed to the CEO resulted in an 85% increase in opens and 150% increase donations.](#)

Over half came from someone high up in leadership like the President or Chancellor or the Executive Director or CEO.

Who Was the Email Written From?





In our applied research with real nonprofits, we've often seen that design elements in fundraising emails can often reduce the likelihood of securing a gift, [like this experiment where removing design elements led to an increase in donations of 29%](#).

For the Higher Ed emails we reviewed, here's what we saw as it relates to design elements:

93% had a logo

53% had a 'header' image

7% had a 'hero' image

13% used a video

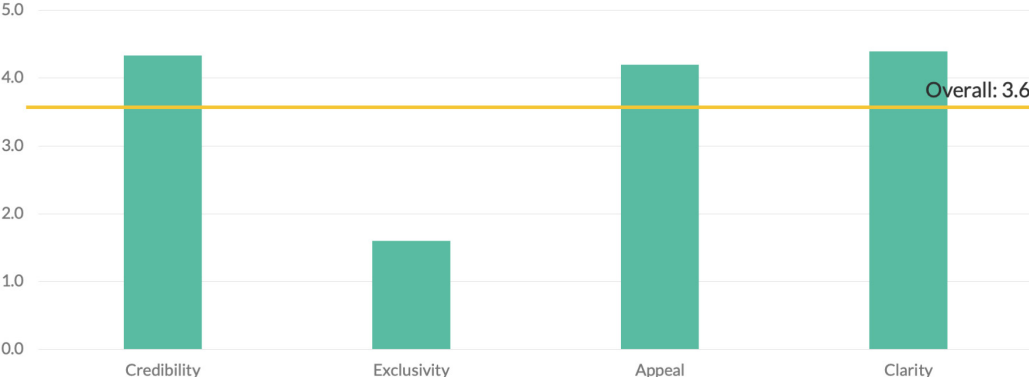
53% used buttons

27% had signature images

33% had social media icons

The design of an email is supposed to work with and support the main message of the email which we wanted to look at as well. We scored each email 1 to 5 in the areas of appeal, credibility, clarity, and exclusivity and here's what we found:

How would you rate the message in each area?



The emails scored higher in every area except Exclusivity when compared to similar email scoring we did in the Why Should I Give to You Study (not just for Higher Ed organizations).

Here was one of the higher scoring emails we reviewed:



Dear Big Blue family,

During this unparalleled and challenging time, I know you have received many communications about the changes to daily life due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also have been hearing from many alumni and friends of the University. We are receiving messages and comments daily. At a time when so many are experiencing hardship and challenges of their own, we are filled with gratitude as you ask us: *Are the basic needs of all students being met? What can I do to support students now?*

We appreciate your heart-felt and genuine concerns.

The rapid transition to online education to complete the semester – and the resulting move of most students from campus – was necessary as part of our broader moral responsibility to help preserve the health and safety of our campus and the larger community we serve.

Although the necessary and right thing to do, those decisions will result in additional hardship for many of our students. Many of our students, for example, may lose jobs on campus or in the community. Our Student and Academic Life team has identified critical gaps that create hardships for some of our students, including:

- Access and affordability of basic needs, like food or housing, that lay the foundation for student success
- Loss of part-time work in greater Lexington area as restaurants and service units close or reduce hours
- Internet access and connectivity, so students can complete their coursework during these challenging times
- Hardware, such as computers or tablets, that provide students with access to faculty and courses during this transition

The Basic Needs and Persistence Fund is the primary mechanism at UK to help students in their time of need. This fund provides services and support for students experiencing varying degrees of uncertainty around basic needs and/or financial distress, which may otherwise prevent them from continuing their education. The importance of this fund and the impact it can have only grows during times of crisis. For more information on how you can support our students during this unprecedented challenge, please click the link below.

SUPPORT UK STUDENTS NOW

Your united show of support through a gift to this fund provides urgently needed tools and encouragement to our students and their families. We are all adjusting to a new normal. But whatever that looks like, it is clear that the pursuit of a college education, a degree at the University of Kentucky, will be even more critical in facing the challenges ahead.

Thank you for considering a gift to this fund. Thank you for your enduring support of the University of Kentucky. And thank you, as members of our Big Blue family, for remaining steadfast in your communities across our nation as we honor our mission as the University of, for, and with Kentucky.

Most sincerely,

Mike Richey '73, '79
Vice President for Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement
University of Kentucky



UK Philanthropy
University of Kentucky
William B. Sturgill Philanthropy Building
Lexington, KY 40506-0015
philanthropy@uky.edu
kentuckycan.uky.edu
[Unsubscribe](#)

[View this email in a web page](#)

You can see that it starts with a warm-ish, personal introduction – it was sent from and signed off from a person – and alludes to the problem and reason for the email. It then gets into the main problem and reason to give in a clear way. The message – student and campus life has been turned upside down – is quite appealing and/or easy to connect with. By highlighting that their Student and Academic Life team identified these gaps it helps build credibility by showing some rigor in their approach before asking.


They bullet point the solutions that a donation today and to the Basic Needs and Persistence Fund will support which is again very clear. They then have a clear call to action and button that leads to the donation page. There is an element of exclusivity in this as it is for the University of Kentucky but that point could possibly be made more clear how University of Kentucky is uniquely positioned to help their students and surrounding area in this time.

Some other things we observed within the email solicitations we analyzed:

- 13% addressed us by name
- 7% referenced our past gift
- 100% asked for a one-time gift
- 0% asked for a specific gift amount
- 87% did not use any additional incentive
- 60% had two more more calls to action

For fundraising emails, the job isn't done just by getting a click but the donation page the email points to also plays a critical role. For example, [in this experiment, the organization changed the donation page their email pointed to to be more cohesive and congruent with the email and saw a 272% increase in conversion rate \(and 420% increase in revenue\).](#)

For the Higher Ed organization solicitation emails we reviewed, we found that 60% pointed to a donation page that was cohesive or congruent. In the first example, you can see how there is no message on the donation page so hard to be immediately cohesive although they do have the same funds/areas mentioned in the email present on the donation page.



Dear Mr. Smith,

Our thoughts are with you and your family as we collectively navigate the challenges and uncertainties presented by COVID-19. Beyond the public health threat posed by this pandemic to our city, state, and nation, we recognize that many of our alumni, friends, and students have been impacted in numerous ways.

These extraordinary circumstances have certainly forced us to rethink the ways in which we provide instruction and service to our students. We have changed the ways we interact with one another and altered daily routines due to a "new normal" that we hope is temporary rather than prolonged.

While we do not yet know when the present danger will subside, we do know that many of you are hurting right now as the result of business closures and the unexpected loss of income streams.

These same issues are of concern for many Auburn University at Montgomery students, who have worked for local restaurants and small businesses in the River Region while pursuing their degrees.

Two inescapable truths have emerged during these trying times:

- We need each other as we navigate the challenges before us.
- Our students need us now more than ever.

While we have done everything possible to ensure their wellbeing and guide their educational journey through the remote delivery of course instruction and support services, our Warhawks can still use a helping hand from those who are able to provide one.

The scholarship assistance we continue to provide does not account for all of the challenges our students are confronting at this time. We still have students living in our residence halls who are not sure if or when they will be able to return to their homes because of financial needs and family hardships.

Others are concerned about whether they will be able to continue their studies due to businesses limiting hours in recent weeks, closing to proactively mitigate the spread of COVID-19 or, more recently, closing by order of the governor.

As we have changed the way we deliver coursework and modified our operations, a number of our friends and alumni have reached out recently and asked the same question: "How can we help?"

We will continue to support our students through such initiatives as our Student Assistance Fund, the AUM Food Pantry, and Counseling & Health Promotions Services as funding allows.

If you are able to provide any level of support for these services, please know that it will make a tremendous impact in caring for our student population during these challenging and ever-changing circumstances.

During this period of uncertainty, it's important for all of us to focus on what we can control – our mindset and the level of care we provide for one another. The latter requires no significant adjustment for any of us, because that is the AUM way.


Thank you, and Go Warhawks!

Carl A. Stockton
Carl A. Stockton, Ph.D.
Chancellor
Auburn University at Montgomery

Please give today

Auburn University at Montgomery
7430 East Drive
Montgomery, AL

Unsubscribe



AUM Giving

Gift Information: Settings, Previous Gifts

Gift Information

Donation Amount: \$

How often
• Single Payment
• Make your annual gift in a single payment today.
• Scheduled Payments
• Make your gift in installments.
• Recurring Payment
• Gift in kind items.

Designations

Designation	Amount	Percent
General	\$	%
Gift from Family	\$	%
AUM Student Assistance Fund	\$	%
Total	\$0.00	0%

304,283,483

Donor Information

Title:

First Name:

Last Name:

Birth:

Preferred Class Year:

Contact Information

Email:

Address 1:

Address 2:

City/State:

State/Province/Region:

Other State/Province:

Country:

Zip/Postal Code:

Additional Address Information:

Phone Number:

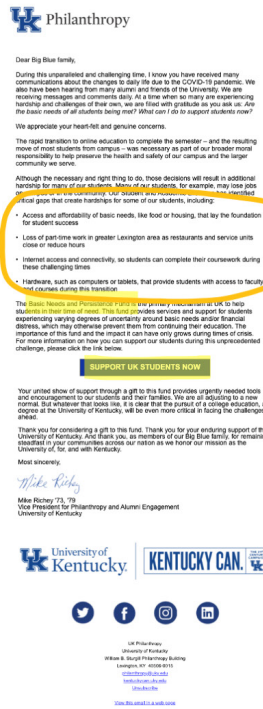
Shared Gift Credit

In Honor or Memory of

1881 2021 Renewal Information


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Compare that to this example where the headline and sub-headline immediately make the connection between the email and the message further draws from the email ensuring the prospective donor is in the right place and can complete their donation with confidence.



Solicitation Email Summary

While the sample size is very small, the fact that so few Higher Ed organizations sent a fundraising email in 45 days, employed personalization strategies like calling us by name and referencing our past gift, or used strategies and tactics like removing design elements, sending from a personal sender, and pointing to a cohesive donation page that we've seen work time and time again in our applied research, shows that there is room for Higher Ed organizations to optimize and improve their fundraising email performance.



All Higher Ed Online Fundraising Scorecard Stats & Infographics

Higher Ed Online Fundraising Scorecard Report

ONLINE GIVING EXPERIENCE

Based on \$20 donations to 105 organizations

77% had 3 or more clear steps in the giving process

One-Time Gift Array

62% of higher ed organizations did not have a suggested gift array

36% pre-selected an amount

Of those that had an array

10% started with the high amount

\$100 was the most commonly available AND pre-selected amount

\$25 was the most common starting amount

95% had at least 3 suggested options

96% of higher ed organizations had a mobile-optimized (no pinching and zooming) donation page (94%)

96% of higher ed organizations used an incentive of some kind (matching, premium, etc.) in their giving process (36%)

77% required non-essential information to complete a gift

58% required a phone number

15% required a fund or designation

14% required a Mr. or Mrs.

12% required a CAPTCHA complete

8% required a relationship/connection answer

9% required some other piece of information

64% had distracting links on the donation page

10% did not have the option to make a recurring gift

10% provide a reason to give monthly

3% of organizations defaulted to a monthly gift

43% of higher ed organizations' donation pages are not on their own domain (21%)

22% had a strong reason to give on their donation page

4% used some type of incentive

43% had multiple calls to action (besides donate) on the donation page

57% of higher ed organizations used "Give" language as the CTA on their homepage (13%)

35% of higher ed organizations need you to take more than 5 seconds to find out where to give

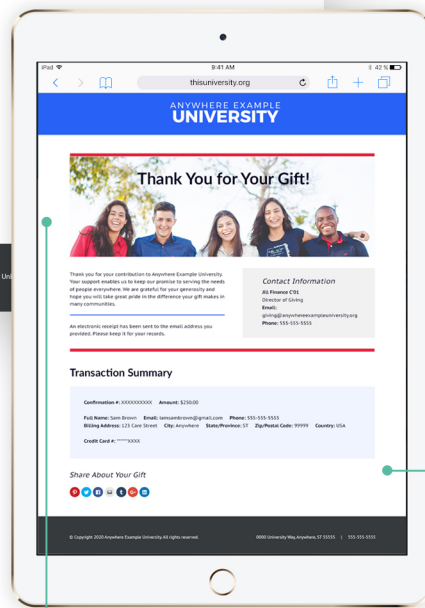
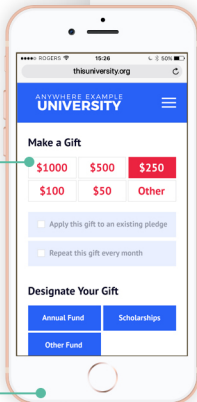
54% had less than one sentence of copy on their donation page

45% of higher ed organizations had a link to their privacy policy on the donation page

96% of higher ed organizations captured the donation amount first

81% of higher ed organizations captured the personal information second

86% of higher ed organizations captured the Credit Card information third



Thank You Page

98% of higher ed organizations had a thank you page

82% of higher ed organizations noted the gift amount on the thank you page

49% expanded on the impact of a donation on the thank you page

44% provided no next step or action for the donor to take on the thank you page

26% offered a social connection or share

14% asked to check if an employer would match your gift

25% of higher ed organizations had a security message (lockbox, icon, seal, copy, etc.) in or around the Credit Card area

3% of higher ed organizations used a trust mark (Charity Navigator, Guidestar, testimonial, etc.) on their donation page (41%)

9% offered something else as an action to take

8% offered more content to read or watch and learn more

8% asked for feedback or offered a survey

8% asked for another gift

2% asked for gift designation or more information about the gift

1% of higher ed organizations used a pop-up



Higher Ed Online Fundraising Scorecard Report

EMAIL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE

Based on 233 emails from 99 organizations

Average higher ed organizations sent

2.4 emails

within

45 days

Median higher ed organizations sent

1 email

within

45 days

76% of higher ed organizations sent less than

3 emails

within

45 days

10% of higher ed organizations did not confirm our donation via email

76% of higher ed organizations did not send any cultivation emails

78% of higher ed organizations did not send any solicitation emails

During COVID-19, higher ed organizations increased non-confirmation email volume

86%

32% of emails were sent between 6 am and 1 pm Central

3.5% of emails were sent on the weekend

Email Sender

80% of emails were sent from the organization

4% of emails were sent from a person, organization

17% of emails were sent from a person

A Deeper Look at Solicitation Emails

Based on 15 emails from 15 organizations

Email Sender Solicitations

67% of emails sent were from the organization

7% from a person, organization

27% from a person

Median day to the first solicitation was

32 days

60% of emails pointed to a 'cohesive' or 'congruent' donation page

Email Signer for Solicitations

33% Executive Director or CEO

20% President or Chancellor

20% Programs person

13% Organization

13% Other

Email Design

93% had a logo

53% had a 'header' image

7% had a 'hero' image

13% used video

53% used buttons

27% had signature images

33% had social media icons

Email Message

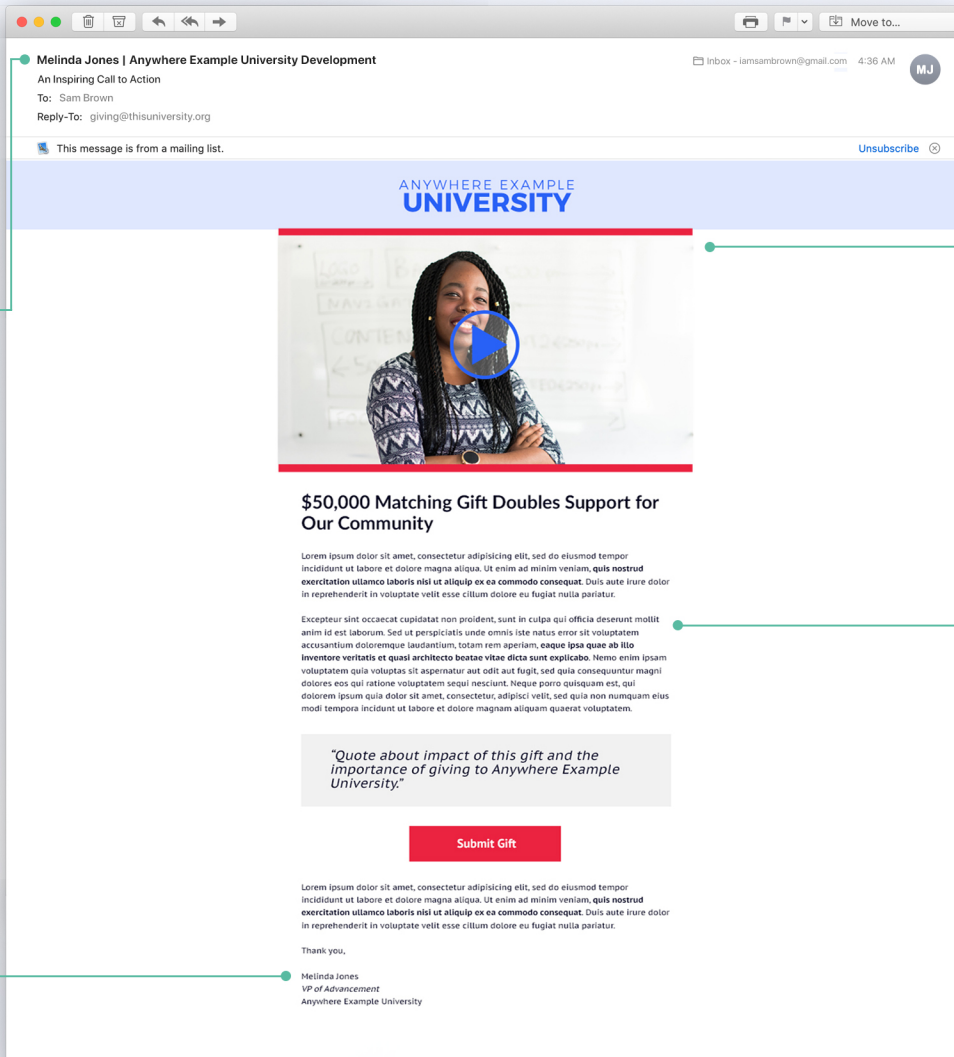
87% did not use any incentive (matching, deadline, etc.)

93% did not reference our past gift

0% asked for a specific dollar amount

60% had two or more calls to action

60% of emails sent to a donation page that had congruence with the email





Resources

Get the Latest Online Fundraising Research & Real Nonprofit Experiments.

What does the online giving experience to public radio stations look like? How many nonprofits are sending mail to their online donors and vice versa? How are nonprofits trying to keep monthly donors whose credit cards have expired? Those are just a few of the questions asked and answered through first-hand, original research performed by the NextAfter Institute.

You can get them all, for free, at nextafter.com/resources.

Improve Your Digital Marketing and Get Certified in Online Fundraising.

Use the code “HIGHERED” to save 50% on any online, on-demand course like Email Fundraising Optimization and Donation & Landing Page Optimization or use it to become a member and access all courses, all-year long at courses. nextafter.com.

The Best-In-Class Digital Fundraising Solution for All Nonprofits.

From quick web giving to powerful peer-to-peer campaigns and everything in between, the best way to reach today's donor is here.

Giving Experiences - With iDonate's Digital Giving Suite, you can meet your supporters where they are in today's digital world and give them the chance to be generous in the ways they desire.

Giving Management - iDonate's Giving Management is your online giving operating system enabling your digital marketing team to successfully execute your digital fundraising strategies.

Success Coaching - With iDonate's Success Coaching, your fundraising teams have access to our fundraising coaches and digital fundraising best practices to help you discover new ways to grow your online giving.

Learn more at idonate.com/solutions.



About

About **i**Donate

iDonate is the leading fundraising software provider that exists to grow nonprofits. Its digital giving system uses integrated payment applications, performance analytics, and success coaching to ensure immediate and enduring growth. Through a commitment to generosity and innovation, iDonate has become the world's standard for donation processing technology.

Learn more at [idonate.com](https://www.idonate.com).

About NextAfter

NextAfter's mission is to decode what works in fundraising and make it as accessible to as many nonprofits as possible. We work towards this mission in three ways:

1. A Fundraising Research Lab - nextafter.com/research

Conducting marketplace research, A/B testing, and digital experimentation to discover what works to attract, acquire, and retain more donors and raise more money online.

2. A Digital Fundraising Consultancy - nextafter.com/work-with-us


Working side-by-side with nonprofit organizations to help them develop and execute research-backed digital fundraising strategies designed to generate sustainable online revenue growth.

3. An Institute for Online Fundraising - nextafter.com/institute

Equipping nonprofit fundraisers and digital marketers with data-driven and evidence-based research, resources, and training.

Over the past 6 years, we have:

- Open sourced over 2,500 online fundraising experiments complete with creative samples, data sets, and key discoveries.
- Done 9 mystery donor studies analyzing online fundraising trends spanning 1000+ different organizations across 12 verticals in the United States, Canada and Australia.
- Enrolled over 4,500 people and certified more than 500 students in one of 8 online courses where fundraisers can deepen their knowledge in critical areas based on real evidence.



Methodology & Study Details

For the online giving experience...

We made \$20 donations to 105 Higher Ed organizations between February 25 to February 28 by starting from the home page and putting ourselves in the shoes of a motivated online donor. We collected 38 pieces of data while making the donation and another 6 on the confirmation/thank-you page. We assigned positive and negative points to our experience based on what our donation page testing has proven is a positive or negative thing and the same scoring we used with The State of Nonprofit Donation Pages study in 2019.

For the email communication experience...

We emails for 45 days – a critical time to engage new subscribers and new donors and longer than a month to capture monthly communication cycles – and then exported them to be classified by 3 independent ‘researchers’ as either:

- **Confirmation:** A usually automated email that confirms and, ideally, thanks you for your donation. For donations, it can often look like a receipt and contain transaction information.
- **Solicitation:** The main purpose of this email is to get you to do something tied to money like give or donate, buy something, or fundraise. Often, will contain a call to action like “Give Today” or “Donate Now”.
- **Cultivation:** Anything else where the main purpose of the email is not a confirmation or solicitation. This could be a thank you, story, newsletter, update, video, report, article, etc. or asks you to do something like volunteer, sign a petition, or advocate for the

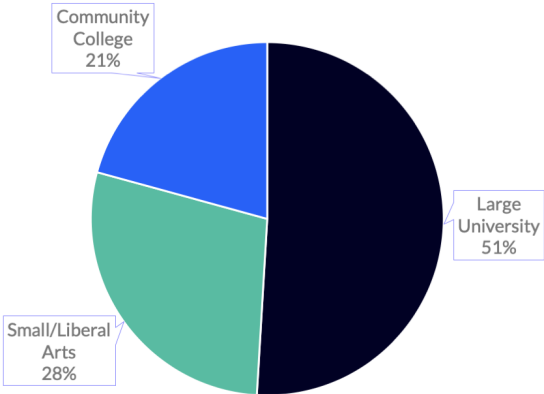
organization in some way. If it has a call to action at all, it is often “Read More” or “Learn More”.

We then analyzed the emails by type, sender, frequency, time, etc. and looked at the first cultivation email specifically to see for what the action/ask was (if any).

For the deeper look at solicitation emails, we looked at the first email classified as a solicitation email and then collected 17 pieces of data on those emails.

Who Is In the Study?

Of the 105 Higher Ed organizations in the study we were able to successfully give to – we could not complete a donation to 3 Community Colleges and 1 Small/Liberal Arts Organization – 51% (53) were Large Universities, 28% were Small/Liberal Arts Organizations, and 21% were Community Colleges.



WE COULD NOT COMPLETE A DONATION TO 3 COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND 1 SMALL/LIBERAL ARTS ORGANIZATION.

Large University

Auburn University
AUM
Baylor University
Boston College
Brown University
Bucknell University
Citadel
Clemson University Foundation
Florida State University
Indiana University Foundation
LSU Foundation
Mississippi State
North Carolina State
Ohio State
Oklahoma State University
Foundation
Pittsburgh University
Portland State University
Rice University
Southern Methodist University
Syracuse University
Texas A & M
Texas Christian University
Texas Tech University System
University of Alabama
University of Arizona Foundation
University of Arkansas
University of California - San Diego
University of Central Florida
University of Chicago
University of Cincinnati Foundation
University of Colorado Foundation

University of Connecticut
Foundation
University of Georgia
University of Houston
University of Illinois
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville
University of Michigan
University of Mississippi
University Of Missouri
University of Nebraska
University of New Hampshire
University of North Carolina
University of Southern California
University of Tennessee Foundation
University of Utah
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin Foundation
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Tech
Wake Forest University
West Virginia University Foundation
Yale

Small/Liberal Arts

Amherst College
Azusa Pacific University
Biola University
Bowdoin College
Carleton College
Catholic University of America
College of William and Mary
Foundation
Concordia University
Dallas Theological Seminary
Davidson College
Davidson College
Dordt College
Grinnell College
Hamilton College
Haverford College
Hillsdale College
Hope College
Middlebury College
North Park University
Pepperdine University
Pomona College
Rhodes College
Rockefeller University
Santa Clara University
St. Olaf College
Thomas Aquinas College
Trinity University
Washington University in St. Louis
Westmont College
Wheaton College
Williams College

Community College

Brazosport College
Coconino Community College
Colorado Mountain College
CUNY Kingsborough Community
College
DeAnza College
East Mississippi Community College
Garden City Community College
Independence Community College
Itasca Community College
Mayland Community College
North Central Kansas Technical
College
Northeast Alabama Community
College
Northwest Iowa Community College
Pearl River Community College
Pierce College
Rend Lake College
Saint Paul College
Santa Barbara City College
Snow College
Southeast Community College
Valencia College
Victor Valley College
Walla Walla Community College
West Kentucky Community and
Technical College
Western Wyoming Community
College

What Experiments Were Referenced?

All the following experiments can be found by going to nextafter.com experiments and searching by the Experiment ID in the search pane.

Required Phone

Experiment ID:
#2112

Field Layout

Experiment ID:
#1007

Simplification Redesign

Experiment ID:
#3576

Prioritization of Choices

Experiment ID:
#12227

Social Proof

Experiment ID:
#16415

Remove Verification Page

Experiment ID:
#3712

Mobile Optimization Redesign

Experiment ID:
#11214

Copy Addition

Experiment ID:
#6623

Under Button Copy

Experiment ID:
#19795

Recurring Messaging

Experiment ID:
#18659

Additional Ask on Thank You Page

Experiment ID:
#262

Individual Sender

Experiment ID:
#8010

Different Email Sender

Experiment ID:
#11472

Email Design

Experiment ID:
#20996

Campaign Donation Page

Experiment ID:
#7176

