



# Why Direct Mail Should Be a Core Channel in Your Fundraising Strategy

Nonprofits see 3x higher response than email, and strong returns when executed well. This practical guide shows how to build direct mail into a cost-effective, strategic fundraising channel while printing with purpose.

# Who are We?



## Parent Nonprofit

A nonprofit building a disability-inclusive world for schools, businesses, and people, across every stage of life.



## Social Enterprise of Northwest Center

Custom direct mail and print with 20+ years of printing experience. 100% of profits fund Northwest Center programs.



## One-Stop Solution

Print and mail under one roof by a partner who understands nonprofit needs and budgets.



## Mission-Driven Impact

Every order directly benefits people with disabilities through Northwest Center programs.



## Real Support

Personalized service from real people who understand the nonprofit world.

# Who is Northwest Center?

## Services Across Every Stage of Life

### Hospital-to-Home

supports homecomings for hospitalized babies, families, and clinicians.

### Early Supports

is a family-centered program of therapy for children with developmental delays.

### Early Learning

operates an inclusive school where children with and without disabilities learn together.

### IMPACT

provides inclusion training and support for early learning providers.

### Employment Services

works with adults with disabilities to find employment, provide ongoing job coaching and support.

## Impact in 2025

**63,694**

Children and adults with disabilities served

**1,005**

Children (and often their families) received therapy services

**688**

Adults supported with skill development and individualized workplace solutions

**60+ years building a disability-inclusive world for schools, businesses, and people, across every stage of life.**



# Meet the Print it Forward Team



**Brad Spikes**

**VP Marketing**

- Lead the launch and scaling of high impact social enterprise marketing
- 20+ years of marketing experience across SaaS, telecom, and financial services
- Former tech marketing leader at Microsoft and Intuit, specializing in digital strategy and GTM



**Mike Dow**

**Vice President,  
Commercial Printing**

- 30+ years experience in commercial printing operations
- Sales and sales management
- Offset printing, digital printing, large format and mailing services



**Sarah Hickman**

**Director,  
Sales + Operations**

- Outgoing and enthusiastic print professional with over 20 years of experience
- Extensive expertise in graphic design and production
- Known for building strong, lasting relationships with clients through attentive, personalized service

# What we'll Cover Today

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# 01

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## Why Direct Mail Still Works

The data behind direct mail's enduring  
power for nonprofits



# The Numbers don't Lie

Direct mail delivers measurable results for nonprofits

5–9%  
or 3x

Higher response rate  
than email marketing

Source: <https://www.designdistributors.com/blog/20-statistics-proving-direct-mail-is-thriving>

70%

Of people say direct  
mail feels more  
personal

Source:  
<https://www.uspsdelivers.com/why-direct-mail-is-more-memorable/>

92%

Of direct response  
fundraising revenue  
comes from direct mail

Source:  
<https://www.meyerpartners.com/direct-mail-services-for-nonprofits>

\$4.00

Average ROI per \$1  
spent for nonprofits

Source:  
<https://fepreports.org/>



*In a world of digital noise, direct mail cuts through. It's tangible, personal, and builds trust in ways that emails simply can't match. Mail lives 17 days in the home. Email lives seconds.*

# The Direct Mail Advantage



## The Tangible Advantage

- Creates a physical connection with donors
- Engages multiple senses (sight, touch)
- Stays visible longer than digital messages
- Cuts through inbox overload



## The Trust Factor

- Direct mail is perceived as more credible
- Handwritten elements boost open rates
- Shows investment in the relationship
- Builds emotional connection to mission

# 02

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## Campaign Planning Essentials

Set your goals, timeline, and budget  
before anything else



# Set SMART Campaign Goals

**S**

**Specific**

Define exactly what you want to achieve — e.g., increase year-end donations by 15%

**M**

**Measurable**

Set quantifiable targets so you can track progress against your goals

**A**

**Achievable**

Keep goals realistic based on your budget, staff capacity, and timeline

**R**

**Relevant**

Align with your organization's broader mission and fundraising strategy

**T**

**Time-bound**

Set clear deadlines and milestones for campaign delivery

# Timeline & Budget Planning



## \$ Budget Planning Tip

Account for all costs: Creative/design, printing, postage, data/list management, and tracking. A typical first campaign budget ranges from \$2,000–\$10,000. Start small, test, and scale what works.

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## Know Your Audience

Segment smarter, personalize deeper,  
and connect with the right donors



# Segmentation Drives Performance

Segment your donor base to send the right message to the right people



## Giving History

First-time donors, recurring donors, major gift prospects, lapsed donors



## Demographics

Age, location, interests, and communication preferences of your donors



## Engagement Level

Event attendees, volunteers, email subscribers, social media followers



## Acquisition Source

How donors first connected — online, events, referrals, or prior campaigns

# Data Hygiene & Personalization

## Data Hygiene

*Clean data = less waste, more impact*

- Run NCOA (National Change of Address) updates
- Remove duplicates
- Verify addresses using CASS(Coding Accuracy Support System) certification
- Update donor records regularly
- Suppress opt-out and do-not-mail requests

## Personalization Strategy

*Make every donor feel seen*

- Use donor names throughout the letter
- Reference their specific giving history
- Customize ask amounts based on past gifts
- Tailor messaging by donor segment
- Include personalized impact statements

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## Crafting Your Message

Tell your story, make the ask, and  
inspire action



# Storytelling that Inspires Action

1

## The Hook

Open with a compelling personal story or striking statistic that grabs attention immediately

2

## The Problem

Clearly describe the challenge your organization addresses — make it real and relatable

3

## The Solution

Show how your nonprofit is making a difference, with specific examples of impact

4

## The Ask

Make a clear, specific request with suggested giving amounts tied to tangible outcomes



*Pro Tip: Include a P.S. line — it's one of the most-read parts of any letter. Use it to restate urgency or highlight a matching gift.*

# Storytelling that Inspires Action

*Dear Sarah,*

**Hook**

*Last Tuesday, a 9-year-old named Marcus walked into our after-school center wearing shoes two sizes too small. He didn't complain. He just sat down, pulled out his homework, and got to work. His tutor noticed him wincing every time he shifted in his chair.*

**Problem**

*Marcus is one of 4,200 kids in our county who show up to school hungry, under-resourced, and still trying. They're not statistics. They're kids doing their best with whatever they've got.*

**Solution**

*Here's what we know works: When a child like Marcus gets consistent support (a tutor, a meal, a pair of shoes that actually fit), they don't just survive the school year. They start to thrive. Last year, 87% of the kids in our program improved their reading level by at least one full grade. Marcus moved up two.*

*A gift of \$35 keeps a child in our after-school program for a full month. That's tutoring, a hot meal every weekday, and the supplies they need to keep up. \$75 covers a child for the rest of the school year. And \$150 sponsors a child through our summer bridge program so they don't lose ground over the break.*

*Marcus doesn't know someone paid for his new shoes. He just knows they fit. Your gift does that kind of thing, quietly and completely.*

*With gratitude,  
[Executive Director Name]*

*P.S. Every dollar you give before April 15th will be matched by the Johnson Family Foundation. That means your \$35 becomes \$70, and one month of support becomes two.*

**Ask**

**The P.S.**

# Writing Tips & Response Mechanisms

## Writing Best Practices

- Use simple, everyday words for effortless comprehension.
- Use short paragraphs (2–3 sentences max)
- Lead with emotion, support with data
- Include a clear, singular call to action
- Use “you” more than “we” or “I”
- Add a compelling P.S. line

## Make It Easy to Respond

- Pre-addressed return envelopes
- QR codes linking to donation pages
- Personalized URLs (PURLs)
- Phone number for donations
- Text-to-give options
- Multiple suggested giving amounts

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## Design That Gets Noticed

Envelope, letter layout, and format  
options that stand out in the mailbox



# Design Principles for Direct Mail

## Envelope Design

- Use teaser copy to create curiosity
- Consider hand-addressed look for warmth
- Use color and branding strategically
- Test window vs. closed-face envelopes

## Letter Layout

- Strong visual hierarchy with clear headings
- Bold the most important sentences
- Use photos that show real impact
- Keep white space for readability

## Some Format Options

### Postcards

Low cost, high visibility, great for event announcements

### Self-Mailers

No envelope needed, bi-fold or tri-fold options

### Letter Packages

Most effective for fundraising appeals and major asks

### Dimensional Mail

Highest open rates, ideal for major donor cultivation

# Key Elements of a Mail Piece

The right elements turn a mail piece into a response driver

The diagram illustrates two mail piece designs with the following key elements:

- CTA:** Call to Action text: "Join the Global Youth Movement".
- QR Code:** A QR code located below the CTA.
- Trust Signal:** Text: "Trusted by 300+ schools and community partners".
- Logo:** The ELEV8 logo, featuring the word "ELEV8" and a stylized dollar sign with a graduation cap.
- Bold Headline:** The main headline: "Empowering Youth Education and Leadership Programs Globally".
- Address Area:** The return and mailing address information, including "Faux Return-Add Foundation", "123 Avenue, Madeup St. / PO BOX 4567", and "Faux County, Fauxland".
- Contact Info:** Contact details including the website "elev8.com", phone number "1-833-220-7083", and email "info@elev8.com".
- High Quality Image:** A photograph of two people, an adult and a child, looking at a laptop screen together.

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## Production & Mailing

Print specs, paper choices, postal regulations, and logistics



# The Nonprofit Postage Advantage

Eligible organizations can access significant USPS savings

**50-75%+**

Potential postage savings per piece vs. commercial rates

Source: USPS

**~\$6,020**

Estimated savings on a 10,000-piece campaign

**~\$0.178**

Nonprofit letter rate (vs. \$0.78 commercial)

Source: USPS

**Reinvest**

Redirect savings into reach, frequency, or creative



Nonprofit postage rates aren't automatic, and the USPS application process can feel complex. Many nonprofits miss out on these savings simply because they don't know where to start.

Plan for 1 to 2 weeks and consider a full-service nonprofit printing partner like **Print it Forward** to help guide you through the requirements.

# Choosing the Right Format

Match your format to your campaign goal for maximum impact

## Letter Package

**Best for: Appeals & Fundraising**

Highest response rates for donation asks. Includes letter, reply form, and return envelope. Best for storytelling and emotional connection.



## Postcard

**Best for: Reminders & Quick Actions**

Lowest cost, highest visibility (no envelope to open). Ideal for event invitations, QR-code driven actions, and donor reactivation.



## Self-Mailer

**Best for: Updates & Invitations**

More space than a postcard, lower cost than a letter. Great for newsletters, event awareness, and program updates. Bi-fold or tri-fold options.



*Not sure which format to start with? A letter package typically delivers the highest ROI for fundraising appeals. Use postcards to add lower-cost touchpoints between major campaigns.*

# Why a Full-Service Partner Matters

## The Outcome Chain

- Better data = Less waste and higher deliverability
- Better targeting = Higher response rates
- Better postal strategy = Lower per-piece costs
- Better tracking = Smarter optimization
- *Each step compounds. Skipping one weakens the rest.*

## Full-Service Capabilities

- Data hygiene (CASS, NCOA, Move Update)
- Variable data personalization
- Print production and inserting
- Postal prep and presort optimization
- Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb) tracking
- Delivery visibility and campaign reporting
- List acquisition for nonprofits without a list



*USPS requires mailers to update addresses within 95 days of mailing to maintain nonprofit postage rates. A good partner handles Move Update compliance automatically.*

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## Tracking & Measuring Success

KPIs, ROI calculation, and A/B testing  
for continuous improvement



# Key Metrics to Track

## Response Rate

Percentage of recipients who take action (donate, call, visit)

Industry avg: 5–9%

## Average Gift Size

Mean donation amount across all responses received

Track vs. prior campaigns

## Cost Per Dollar Raised

Total campaign cost divided by total donations generated

Goal: <\$0.25 per \$1

## Donor Retention Rate

Percentage of previous donors who give again

Aim for 40–60%



*Always A/B test: Try different envelopes, copy variations, ask amounts, and formats. Test one variable at a time for clear results.*

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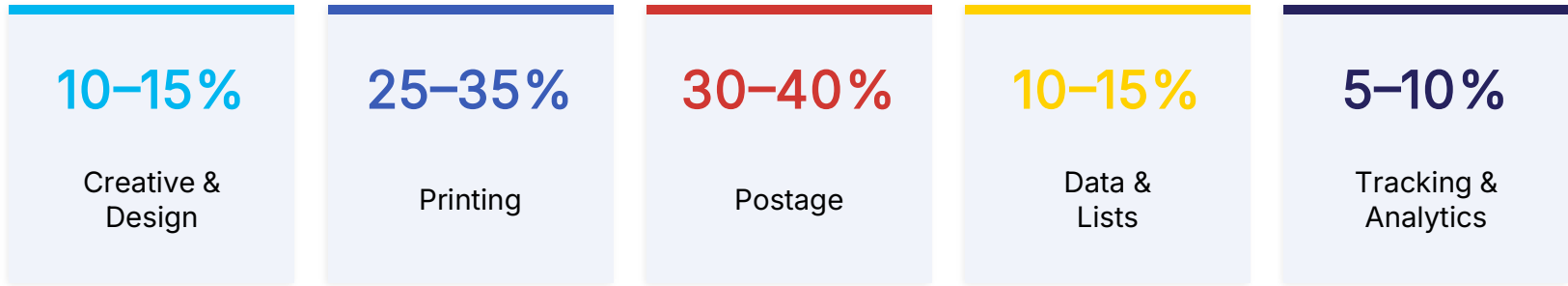
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## Budgeting & Multichannel Tips

Control costs, maximize ROI, and  
integrate with digital channels



# Budget Breakdown & Cost Savings



## Cost-Saving Strategies

- ✓ **Use nonprofit postage rates**  
Save 50-75% on postage costs vs commercial rates with USPS nonprofit rates
- ✓ **Standardize sizes**  
Avoid surcharges by sticking to standard letter and postcard dimensions
- ✓ **Batch & presort your mailings**  
Bulk processing and presorting earn significant postal discounts
- ✓ **Combine print runs**  
Gang multiple projects together to reduce per-piece printing costs

# Multichannel Integration

Amplify your direct mail with coordinated digital touchpoints



## Email

Send preview emails before mail drops and follow-up reminders after delivery. Reinforce the same message across channels.



## Social Media

Run parallel social campaigns with matching creative. Use retargeting ads for recipients who haven't responded.



## Website

Create dedicated landing pages for each campaign with personalized URLs. Track online conversions from mail pieces.



*Time your channels: Email 2–3 days before mail drop, social media on delivery day, follow-up email 5–7 days after.*

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## Compliance, Ethics & Your Action Checklist

Stay compliant, act ethically, and get started with confidence



# Compliance & Ethics



## Regulatory Compliance

- USPS postal regulations for nonprofit rates
- State registration for charitable solicitation
- Data privacy laws (state and federal)
- CAN-SPAM and do-not-mail list compliance
- ADA accessibility for materials
- Required disclosures and disclaimers



## Communication Ethics

- Truthful representation of impact & needs
- Respectful imagery of beneficiaries
- Emotional integrity — inspire, don't manipulate
- Donor-centric approach to communication
- Transparent use of donated funds
- Honor opt-out and frequency preferences

# Your Action Checklist

## Pre-Campaign

- ✓ Define campaign goals & KPIs
- ✓ Segment your audience
- ✓ Develop creative brief & copy
- ✓ Select vendor and print specs

## Campaign Execution

- ✓ Finalize design & get approvals
- ✓ Clean mailing lists (NCOA/CASS)
- ✓ Print, assemble, and mail
- ✓ Launch coordinated digital touchpoints

## Post-Campaign

- ✓ Track responses & donations
- ✓ Calculate ROI and cost per dollar raised
- ✓ Send thank-you acknowledgments
- ✓ Document learnings for next campaign

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## AI in Your Fundraising Toolkit

Bonus: Practical AI prompts for  
fundraising and direct mail



# Your team's time is too valuable to start from a blank page.

## WHY BOTHER WITH AI?

3 hrs

### Saved per piece of content when using AI

That's 2.5 hours back every single day for marketing teams.

*Source: CoSchedule State of AI in Marketing Report, 1,000+ marketers surveyed (Dec 2024)*

5 hrs

### Per week saved — over a month of time per year

Marketers using generative AI reclaim 5+ hours weekly on copy and content.

*Source: Salesforce Generative AI Snapshot Series, 1,000+ marketers (2024)*

10

### Ready-to-paste prompts cover every stage of a campaign

From audience segmentation to post-campaign ROI.

## HOW IT WORKS — ONE REAL EXAMPLE

### YOU COPY AND PASTE A PROMPT

Write a one-page fundraising letter using this four-part structure: Hook drawn from our beneficiary story. Problem we address. Solution plus one of our impact stats. Ask tied to our signature amounts. End with a P.S. highlighting [MATCHING GIFT]. Write at an 8th-grade reading level, keep paragraphs short, and use "you" more than "we."

### AI RESPONDS IN SECONDS (snippet)

Dear Maria,

Last winter, Juan almost dropped out of school. Today, he's teaching his younger sister to code.

Your gift of \$150 gives one young person a full semester — and every dollar is matched by the Harris Family Foundation.

Will you make that possible before December 31?

P.S. This match expires at midnight on Dec 31 — don't wait. . . .

*AI generates a first draft in seconds. You review, refine, and make it yours — then Print it Forward handles print, mail & tracking.*




# Learn more about what Print it Forward can help you achieve

Get our complete 24-page playbook, AI prompting pack, and other free resources to help launch your next campaign.

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[printitforward.net](https://printitforward.net)

*100% of profits support programs for children and adults with disabilities*

 A division of Northwest Center



Scan to Get Free Resources



# Thank You

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# Your Questions?

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