



5 Metrics to Measure Your Nonprofit's Success

By Kayla Matthews

When gauging your nonprofit's success, relying on gut instinct is foolish. It's necessary to study metrics and see how they change over time. There are several especially worthy measurements that can tell you how your nonprofit stacks up.

1. Fundraising Cost Per Dollar Raised

Fundraising is a familiar activity to nonprofits, and there are a huge number of potential ways to get results from donors. However, it's also easy to go overboard and end up with a costly fundraising campaign that didn't generate the desired results.

There are many fundraising metrics you could look at, but one of the easiest ways to check your impact is to compare the amount of money raised with how much you spent to make the campaign happen. Figure that out by dividing the fundraising cost by the amount you raised.

After determining the results for one fundraiser, look at your organization's performance historically and see if there are notable patterns. For example, you might notice that the most expensive fundraiser also generated the most money for your cause.

2. Outcomes

Answering the question of how well your nonprofit serves its purpose involves looking at outcomes. Then, you'll have a handle on how much or how little your nonprofit impacted your clients or society at large. Evaluating outcomes requires focusing on particular things you're trying to change and studying data to see if goals were met.

If your nonprofit deals with homelessness, you could find out whether the number of homeless people rose, stayed the same or got lower after you launched a coordinated effort to get people into long-term accommodations and off the streets. Make sure to research things thoroughly when looking at an outcomes metric. You may find other factors besides those associated with your nonprofit that caused a negative or positive shift.

3. How Your Organization Compares to Similar Entities

Knowing how your nonprofit compares to other, similar organizations is a great way to not only evaluate your own effectiveness, but also get ideas for new success metrics to monitor.

A nonprofit sector survey from BDO recently revealed that 66 percent of nonprofit organizations had a positive net income from the past year. This might be a metric you could monitor within your own organization to determine how you're doing overall, and how those findings compare to other organizations like yours.

If you keep track of how the nonprofit sector as a whole is fairing, you'll likely find it easier to evaluate the success of your own organization and identify new steps to take in the future.

4. Conversion Rate

At a retail store, conversion rates go up when people carry out desirable actions, such as buying items or redeeming offers. It's important to keep track of conversion rates at your nonprofit, too, but realize the things you measure might be different than what a retailer would care to know.

Google Analytics can tell you about many of the activities that occur on your nonprofit website, such as the pages users go to most often and whether they reach the homepage through Google searches. Think of the tool as a way to measure user engagement, whether conversions happen when people donate money, sign up for newsletters or agree to volunteer for a few hours at your next community event. Keeping tabs on conversion rate-related metrics in Google Analytics is a good habit to have, especially while watching performance changes throughout time.

5. Awareness

If people don't know what your nonprofit does or even that it exists, you'll have a hard time meeting organizational goals. That's why it's crucial to consider awareness one of your must-measure metrics. You can go about it in numerous insightful ways.

Share of voice is the percentage of people who are talking about a topic related to your nonprofit and bringing up your organization's name at the same time. A website or app that tracks mentions across social media, blogs and similar sites could be a good resource to consider.

Brand-term and cause-term search data—found in Google Analytics—can also highlight awareness levels. The first metric relates to the number of times people search for your nonprofit's name directly through Google and the second measures the same thing, except for a cause.

If you feel those three awareness-related metrics don't tell a complete story of how much people know about your organization, use others that make more sense. Regardless of your approach, awareness is important because it ties into visibility and could make people more likely to donate to your organization instead of another one with a similar focus.

These five metrics will get you off to a good start as you zoom in on specifics and become more familiar with your nonprofit's performance. The things you learn could shape future strategies.