



HOW TO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE ON A BUDGET:  
INCREASING EFFICIENCY AND  
NOTABILITY AS AN NGO

## The Importance of Tightening the Belt

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Every day, NGOs face numerous challenges, from keeping up with regulatory demands (sometimes in multiple countries) to finding the right staff members and requisitioning supplies, the operations of an NGO can be just as complicated as any international business. Meeting these challenges takes time, effort, and capital.

For many NGOs, acquiring the capital needed to continue operations is one of the biggest challenges of all. In a perfect world, every non-government organisation and charity would have enough funding to meet all of their goals.

Unfortunately, donations are not unlimited.

When people make donations, they are entrusting their hard-earned money to an organisation that they believe will make a difference, but each person can only give away so much of their own income. With the cacophony of voices out there calling for donations to help one cause or another, donors have to pick and choose who they can trust to do the most good with their money.



### What Happens When Funds Run Dry

Every year, more and more small charities and NGOs have to close their doors because of a lack of funding. For example, in April of 2014, a Frizington-based charity that focused on raising awareness of the risks of drug addiction and educating children to avoid drug abuse announced that it would have to close its doors because of “a lack of accessible funding for small charities.”

The story was covered by the BBC and published on their website. However, it is just one example out of many of a small charity having to close because of a lack of funds.

Because donations aren't limitless, it is vital to make sure that your own organisation makes every charitable contribution that it receives go as far as possible. Greater efficiency and money management not only makes your organisation look more attractive to potential donors, it can help your organisation survive through lean times.

How can your own organisation accomplish such a task? To help answer this question, we've assembled a few tips for improving efficiency, reducing costs, and more.

## Tips for Stretching Funds

By making donations go further, your organisation can do more with fewer resources. Here, you will find a few ideas for making your funds stretch a little so that your organisation can get more from charitable contributions. You may find a few suggestions here that you're already doing, and a few that you may not have thought of. It is our hope, however, that this list will inspire your NGO to be more effective and efficient than ever. So, without further ado, here are our strategies for conserving funds and making charitable contributions last longer and do more.

### #1: Soliciting Volunteer Help

Let's start with a fairly basic suggestion. By using volunteer help, many organisations save on labour costs for many day-to-day activities, and even on major projects, such as disaster relief or humanitarian aid distribution. This is why many NGOs use volunteer workers for daily operations.

There are many people out there who would much rather actively contribute to a good cause by taking part in the work rather than just throwing money at the problem. From regular private citizens to celebrities, there are almost always people looking to donate their time and effort.

To take this a step further, however, consider signing up to be a part of a volunteer programme for other local organisations. For example, many schools have programmes for students to volunteer with various charities and aid organisations. Making connections with such programmes can help your NGO gain a steady supply of volunteers to help.



The major caveat with enlisting volunteer help is making sure that your organisation follows all of the regulations for each region that you utilise volunteers in, such as applicable labour laws for minors who may be volunteering as a part of an aforementioned school programme.



## #2: Reducing Reliance on Paperwork

Sometimes, the various forms your organisation has to keep up with for various tasks can be an incredible nuisance. While we would advise against simply chucking all of your NGO's paperwork out of the nearest window (as cathartic as that might be), minimising your existing paperwork can help your organisation save time and money.

First, you can examine your existing forms for items that are redundant or are no longer necessary. For example, if a specific form field entry was once required by a regulatory standard that

has since been repealed, or no longer applies to your organisation, remove it. Simplifying paperwork for tasks such as donor acquisition makes it less time-consuming, meaning that in-field staff can accomplish more in the same amount of time.

Next, try to consolidate forms that are all part of the same workflow. If you have three different forms for a process, then that means three times as much paperwork that you'll have to go through when looking up information later (not to mention three times as much paper waste). Combining forms makes life easier for your staff, as well as reducing your carbon footprint.

To take this a step further, you can go largely paperless, transferring your data capture to electronic recording methods. This presents numerous advantages over using pen and paper methods. Using electronic data capture on a mobile device allows in-field staff to get information quickly, and transmit that information to your central office nearly-instantly over an internet connection. Updates and changes to forms can be distributed in minutes instead of days, and with every staff member using the same programme, your forms can be consistent across every field of operation (saving for differences that are mandated by local regulatory bodies).

## #3: Using Alternative Communication Channels Instead of Paid Services

How much does postage, long-distance phone bills, and other paid communication services cost your organisation each year? The answer might surprise you. In any organisation, communication is critical to success. However, that doesn't mean that your organisation cannot use some alternative avenues of communication to coordinate efforts. For example, how often does your organisation distribute important information to all staff members? If your organisation is very active, it's probably very frequently. A traditional method of sending out mass communications



is typically via regular mail, which can take days. Another, more modern equivalent is to use text messages, which can quickly get expensive for staff members who don't have unlimited texting plans on their devices.

Instead, consider using email communications. There are many free email services out there that your staff can use to send not just messages, but important attachments such as video or audio files that phone and text communications wouldn't support.

Also, an email can be sent from nearly anywhere on the planet where a staff member can establish an internet connection to your office, without long-distance charges.



#### **#4: Purchasing Supplies in Bulk and Stocking up while they're Inexpensive**

NGOs go through a lot of supplies in their day to day operations. This goes double for humanitarian aid and relief organisations, who have to acquire and distribute supplies.

From basic office supplies such as printing paper and toner, to other items more specific to your NGO's particular mission, staying stocked can be an enormous (and expensive) challenge.

While there's no real way to eliminate some supply costs, your NGO can minimize costs through careful planning and bulk shopping. For example, an NGO that is focused on providing relief to homeless or displaced persons could purchase winter supplies in the spring when they're in less demand. While such supplies wouldn't be useful until the next winter, it would eliminate the need to purchase such supplies while they're in higher demand, and thus more expensive.



Naturally, if the supplies are of a perishable nature, such as fruits and vegetables, then purchasing such supplies out of season might not be the best option.

For more basic supplies, finding a bulk supply company that can offer a competitive price for large shipments can help reduce costs in the long run.

Another idea for reducing the cost of acquiring foodstuffs (and similar relief supplies) is to accept donations of

shelf-stable goods, such as canned food, and blankets, clothes, etc. Many people have old clothing, bedding, and more that they aren't using and will happily donate to a good cause, or canned food that they can easily spare. Taking in these supplies (in accordance with local regulations) can make getting the supplies needed for humanitarian aid missions much easier and more cost effective.

## #5: Using Loss Prevention Techniques to Reduce the Impact of Theft

In any organisation, theft is an everyday risk factor that needs to be addressed. Whether the result of external factors, such as a break-in, or internal factors, such as fraud by a staff member, theft is a very real issue for all too many NGOs.

To preserve assets and capital, it is vital to employ at least basic loss prevention techniques to minimise the possibility and impact of theft on the organisation.

Things your organisation can do to reduce theft include:

- Performing random internal audits of supplies. When it comes to detecting or preventing theft, a random internal audit is a great tool to use. Having senior staff members double-check inventories and making sure that your inventory reports are accurate is an effective deterrent for internal theft.
- Inspecting your financial records carefully. Sifting through paperwork and financial records can be a tedious task, but it is one that can prevent the loss of untold sums of donated capital. We've all heard of the stories of embezzlement and fraud in some organisations, and it is always an unfortunate event when it does happen. However, by regularly inspecting financial records, and even having an audit performed by a professional accountant or firm, such incidents could be either avoided, or at least detected early enough to prevent the loss of too much operating capital.
- Locking your supplies in a secure location. Many basic disaster relief and humanitarian aid supplies, such as medicine, food, and shelter materials, are tempting targets for looters during a crisis. While placing such



supplies in secure, locked containers might not stop every theft, it can be enough of a deterrent to make a significant difference in how long your supplies last in the field.

In a perfect world, these techniques wouldn't be necessary, but in our world, they can make the difference between



being able to continue helping those in need, or in having to close your organisation's doors for good.

## #6: Saving Excess Funds in Long-Term CDs or Other Investment Formats

When your NGO has a particularly successful donation collection campaign, rather than squander the money right away on things your organisation might not need

right then and there, consider investing that money in long-term, stable investment formats.

For example, if your organisation were to put its excess capital into a year-long Certificate of Deposit (CD), at the end of your next year's donation campaign, you would have that money plus interest to work with, on top of the donated funds from that year. By doing this, you can ensure that your organisation has a modest, but steady, supply of operational capital in the future.

When making such investments, it is usually better to choose safe, stable investments with reliable prospects for growth (such as the aforementioned bank CD). The more risk there is in an investment, the greater the chances that you might lose the money that was invested.

The major caveat with bank CDs and a few other long-term investment strategies is that you effectively lose access to those funds for the agreed-upon duration of time. While some long-term investment formats do offer the option for an early withdrawal of funds in case of an emergency, such withdrawals typically incur a hefty penalty.

So, before going to town with long-term investments, make sure that the funds being invested won't be needed until after the investment is over.

## #7: Applying for Government Subsidies and Programmes

Depending on where your NGO is based and where it operates, as well as the nature of your activities, it may be possible for your organisation to receive funding, supplies, and other forms of support through governmental programmes in your country (or countries) of operation.



Naturally, it is impossible to be specific, as different countries will have different programmes with different eligibility requirements and benefits, which will change with time.

What we can say is that checking with your local governmental body and asking what programmes are available for NGOs such as your own certainly cannot hurt. Failing that, check to see what programmes, if any, similar organisations in your area have successfully received support from.

## #8: Merging with Similar Organisations for Mutual Benefit

Sometimes, the best way to make sure that your organisation can continue to work towards its goals is to consolidate your resources with that of a similar organisation.

In the past, more than a few NGOs have undergone dissolution and mergers with other organisations that are performing similar work successfully. For example, an education charity with operations in multiple regions was recently faced with total closure. In a story covered by Children & Young People Now, this organisation chose to spin off its assets, including its personnel, to other charities and organisations working towards similar goals.

The bulk of the original organisation might be gone in name, but their work still goes on. In fact, many members of the group are more satisfied with their progress after the various mergers of the different divisions, with the former executive saying that the old organisation was “mostly dealing with second-tier activities and we wanted to merge with an organisation that was doing more direct delivery.”

By merging with other organisations, you can gain access to their resources, skills, and even their reputation, any of which can be invaluable to streamlining your own operations. In fact, taking on the name of a highly-recognised organisation by merging with them can help your own NGO earn the respect of potential donors.

Such a measure is not to be undertaken lightly. But, sometimes, it may be the only way to keep working towards the goals that matter most to your organisation.





## Raising Awareness for Less

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For an NGO, getting good publicity and exposure can be an enormous help in driving donor acquisitions. In most cases, people prefer to interact with a reputable organisation that they recognize over a group of strangers that they've never even heard of.

Because of this, it is important to promote your NGO and its good work to potential donors. To this end, many organisations employ television and radio commercials, direct mail pamphlets, and other common methods of communication to capture the public's attention and keep it for as long as it takes to earn enough donations to stay in operation. However, these methods of raising awareness and promoting your NGO can be prohibitively expensive.

Instead of using incredibly costly traditional advertisement methods, it may be worth your while to explore alternatives, such as social media and networking sites such as Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Each of these sites service different audiences, and each is valuable in its own way. Here, we've compiled a few basic tips for using each site and promoting your organisation with them.



### Using Twitter

With a mere 140 characters per post (with images taking 23 characters of that limit), Twitter can be a challenging social media platform to work on, but a very rewarding one when done right.

When a Twitter tweet gains popularity and goes viral, it can expose millions of users to that post, and even end up being re-shared on other social media platforms. This, obviously, can bring enormous notoriety to your organisation.

So, how should your organisation utilise this incredibly powerful social media platform?

Early, and often. With tweets vanishing into viewer's histories with surprising speed, especially if said person follows a lot of different feeds, you may want to post tweets multiple times per day to maximise their impact and make sure that your Twitter followers can see them.

You don't have to do three posts per hour (that might be a tad excessive), but two or three posts per day might be good. For example, one post in the morning, at around 8 or 9 a.m., one post at around lunch time, and one post for right around dinner time.

What should go in these posts? The answer to this question depends largely on the nature of your organisation.

Good ideas might include:

- Recent activities.
- New mission goals (in brief, of course).
- New staff additions.
- Notable contributors/volunteers (with the permission of said person to share their name with the world)
- Update notices with links to your website for more details.

These are just a few of the things you could post on your Twitter feed for your followers. While you can put out requests for donations to your feed, it is usually best not to do so very often.

To make each post more impactful, and easier to find for your followers and others who are interested in the subjects you cover, consider using hashtags to increase the visibility of your posts. These hashtags should be something that is relevant to your organisation and to the activity or person being described in the post, for example #endhunger or #savetheanimals for hunger relief and animal rescue groups, respectively.

With some effort and dedication, Twitter can be an enormously useful social media network for raising awareness of your organisation.

## Pinterest

Compared to social media giants such as Twitter and Facebook, Pinterest is a relative newcomer as a networking site. Also, the focus of Pinterest is a little different from the others.

Pinterest is, first and foremost, a visually-focused social networking site. Users of the site "pin" images and video files to their boards, possibly along with some text explaining the image.

If your organisation uses this site, you'll want to share your most visually compelling images through it. Images that are closely tied to your NGO's core mission, such as a photo of relief supplies being delivered if you're a disaster aid organisation, will typically have the greatest impact here.

## Facebook

In many parts of the world, Facebook has become fairly ubiquitous. This social media site has an enormous following, who keep up with the activities of their friends, coworkers, favorite celebrities and organisations through Facebook on the web and on dedicated apps for mobile devices.

The audience on Facebook is one of the largest and most diverse of any social network. This means that almost any organisation that uses Facebook should be able to find people who would be interested in its activities there. In short, Facebook is one social media network that is definitely worth checking out.



With the ability to create lengthier posts than a twitter post would allow, as well as the ability to embed videos from YouTube and similar video sharing sites, Facebook allows for much more detailed posts than other networks. As for the content of these posts, they can be on any subject related to your NGOs operations that you think people would find interesting.

If a particular post gets a lot of likes, you can use that as an inspiration for future posts. Try experimenting with elements that were in your most popular posts to see what it was about those posts that resonated with your Facebook following.

For the best results on Facebook, you'll probably want to have something new to post at least five times a week. Not every post has to be a long, high-effort production, but making sure that you're active on this network keeps followers coming back for more, and boosts your notoriety.



## LinkedIn

Of the social networking sites listed here, LinkedIn is probably one of the most focused. LinkedIn, as a network, caters to professionals in various industries. NGOs looking to use LinkedIn should keep this fact in mind.

In many cases, the people who are on LinkedIn aren't looking for entertainment, but for serious

business opportunities. Employers use the site to find employees with the skills and experience to fill empty staff positions, and individuals use the site to promote their résumés to employers.

Rather than using LinkedIn to promote your NGO (which you can do, but it may not have the same level of impact that other social media sites would have), you can use it instead as a recruiting tool. Here, there are innumerable people with the skills your organisation might need to be faster and more efficient.

If you do use LinkedIn to promote your NGO, be sure to set up a company profile page so that others can find your organisation easily and learn about it, such as your mission statement, goals, and major achievements. Doing so allows others to get an idea of what you do and why it's important.

Establishing connections with members of your organisation and with others via LinkedIn helps build your profile's authority. At a minimum, you should have at least a hundred connections to buff your profile and give people a sense of your influence.

Posts made on LinkedIn should be for official business-type updates. Here, being authoritative, concise, and clear in your communications is expected by the built-in audience of this site.

## General Social Media Tips

With any social media channel, your goal is to increase the exposure of your organisation to the public. As such, frequency of posts is important. To help with this, you can assign responsibility for handling social media posts to multiple people in your organisation, or even acquire specialised programmes for automating your social media efforts.



Certain programmes allow you to write posts ahead of time, and publish them at pre-determined times for the greatest effect. Giving in-field staff the ability to create and publish such posts allows your organisation to present a ground-level perspective of your operations.

By communicating your field-based activities, you can demonstrate the value of your organisation and its mission to people. Integrating detailed impact reports into these posts by using data captured in the field gives a sense of authenticity and immediacy to your posts. Using electronic data capture methods can make assembling impact reports and sharing the information in them online easier.

## Getting in the News

Beyond using social media to promote your NGO's activities and raise awareness, getting positive media coverage of your organisation is a great way to boost your notoriety and earn the trust of the public. News organisations around the world are often on the lookout for a good human interest story, and your NGO's activities might make for a good headline.



For example, if your organisation is part of a disaster relief effort, give an itinerary of your group's activity schedule to reporting organisations so that they can cover the efforts. Cooperating with the media can earn your NGO some positive coverage, and build up the legitimacy of your organisation to people who may not have heard of you otherwise.

Getting positive press, in the news and online via social networking sites, can help get your NGO in the public eye and earn you increased donations and resources.

## Being both Efficient and Notable

Every day, NGOs across the globe contend with the need to do more good with less capital. As inflation hits markets all over the world, the same funds buy fewer and fewer resources. Balancing the need to work towards goals and the need to amass the resources to fund said work can be incredibly difficult.

Keeping your operations as lean as possible through careful planning and effort can mean the difference between your NGO being able to continue working to fulfill its mission and dissolution. By tightening the belt, your organisation can do more with fewer resources, and even keep a surplus of funds on hand for emergencies when donations run low.

On the other hand, keeping donations coming takes staying in the public consciousness and making sure that potential donors know the value of your organisation's activities. With more donors, your organisation has more capital to work towards its goals. Taking advantage of modern methods of promoting your NGO can allow you to increase



your organisation's notoriety without consuming all of the capital you earn on advertising.

Improving your organisation's efficiency with resources while building notoriety and earning more donations makes it much more likely that your organisation will have a surplus of resources to sustain it through chal-

lenging times. In fact, many potential donors prefer to invest their hard-earned money with donors who are highly efficient, further increasing your chances of acquiring the funds your NGO needs to continue operations.

It is our hope that by employing some of the tips in this guide, your organisation can improve its efficiency and build a positive reputation in the public consciousness. For more information about how your NGO can make charitable contributions go further or leverage new technology, check out the PSI Mobile blog today!

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