

5 Steps to an *Engaging* Nonprofit Annual Report



Creating an annual report is one thing—getting it read is another. That’s why we’re offering this guide and checklist to walk you through the process of compiling an annual report that’s not only comprehensive and accurate, but also engaging.

If you do it right, your nonprofit’s annual report can do a lot of heavy lifting. Sure, it can inform your audience about your last year’s accomplishments. But beyond that, it can also foster trust and credibility, inspire fringe donors to become loyal supporters and attract new people to your org.

You just need to make sure you’re saying the right things to the right people. **Here’s how to start.**

1. Define your audience and your objectives.

- ☐ **Identify your target audience.** Who do you want to read your report? Current and prospective donors, volunteers, beneficiaries, partners, board members or other stakeholders? Maybe it’s some of those or all of them, but it’s important to define who it is you want to speak to so you can determine what content is appropriate.
- ☐ **Determine the purpose of your report.** Is it to build trust? Attract new donors? Motivate your current ones? Or maybe it’s to strengthen relationships with partners by recognizing their support. Before you start planning and writing, know what you want to accomplish (and if you have several goals, that’s great—just define them).

2. Gather and organize content.

- ☐ **Find everything you need before you start.** Collect success stories, photos, financials, metrics on key initiatives and events, testimonials and all the relevant content you can find from the past year. It’s easier to start out with too much and cut than to try to create something from nothing.
- ☐ **Organize your content into sections.** Mission and vision, highlights, programs and events, impact, gratitude, your financial picture, future goals and perhaps most importantly, a call to action. What do you want readers to do after reading your report? Be specific.

3. Tap into the power of storytelling.

- ☐ **Decide on a story or a theme.** Reading a list of numbers and data is about as exciting as watching paint dry. So, wrap your annual report in a story. Craft a compelling narrative about your organization's journey throughout the year. Focus on the impact you made and the challenges you overcame.
- ☐ **Use storytelling techniques to hook your readers.** Make your report relatable and emotionally engaging by featuring the people impacted by your organization as well as the volunteers who make it run. Let their voices tell your story. People give to help people, not organizations.

4. Make your report look amazing.

- ☐ **Choose a clean, consistent design.** Just be sure that it aligns with your branding. You want your annual report to look like an extension of your organization, not something out of left field. (If you outsource your report, be sure the agency understands your brand and voice.)
- ☐ **Communicate with engaging visuals.** Use photos, infographics and charts to make your information visually appealing and easy to understand.
- ☐ **Treat text in a visually appealing way.** Make sure it's easy to read by using legible fonts, appropriate font sizes and a clear hierarchy of headings.

5. Be transparent about the past year and future goals.

- ☐ **Show a breakdown of your finances.** Include income, expenses and how funds were allocated.
- ☐ **Provide a clear picture.** Explain how you used resources to achieve your mission and give an update about your organization's financial health.
- ☐ **Share your future plans.** What goals do you have? What's your outlook for next year? How can supporters continue to make a difference? Cast a vision for what's next and how people can get involved.

Bonus: Create connection and engagement opportunities.

- ☐ **Explain next steps.** Encourage engagement by including calls to action in your report, like "become a recurring donor," "volunteer for an event," or "share the report with others."
- ☐ **Provide avenues for feedback.** Ask readers if your report resonated or if they have suggestions for improvement. This will help you modify future reports and understand what information captures the most attention.

If this feels like a Herculean task, let us shoulder some of the weight. Firespring can help you tell the story of your impact, create an emotional connection with your supporters and attract potential donors to your cause. We've been helping other nonprofits for over 30 years—how'd you like to be next?

Show my annual report some love.

