Nonprofit Branding Essentials - Creating a Brand with Impact

What’s the best way to create an impactful brand for your nonprofit? For a long time, nonprofit branding focused around external communications – setting yourself apart from other nonprofits, managing peoples’ perception of your organization, and fundraising.

Over the past few years, however, a new idea has begun to emerge. Branding is beginning to have both an internal and external value. As the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_role_of_brand_in_the_nonprofit_sector) puts it, “…a strong brand is increasingly seen as critical in helping to build operational capacity, galvanize support, and maintain focus on the social mission.”

What does the evolution of nonprofit branding mean for your organization? Whether you’re a new nonprofit trying to figure out your brand or an established nonprofit looking for a brand overhaul, how can you take advantage of the shifting perception of “branding” and make it work for you? Let’s talk about that!

# Know who your audience is and what your core values are

At the core of every great brand, whether for-profit or nonprofit, is an easily understood core message, mission, and values statement. If we say World Wildlife Fund, you immediately know they’re an organization focused on conservation efforts. You know their core goal is to fight threats to environmental diversity. You probably even know their logo is a panda!

You want to aim for that same level of recognition and understanding through a clear, unwavering mission and vision. Work with your team to figure out what the organization means to you, then connect with donors, volunteers, and Board members to figure out what the organization means to them. Make sure there’s cohesion across your organization as to what you truly stand for.

And once you’ve got that ironed out, turn to your audience. Who are you focusing on? If you’re a nonprofit advocating for better children’s healthcare, for example, perhaps your target audience is current or expecting parents and their families. If you’re an organization based on community outreach, maybe you’re targeting people who have volunteered before, or who are interested in social work. Knowing your brand’s core values can also help define who you’re trying to work with.

# Don’t be afraid to get personal

Think about campaigns or organizations you’ve donated to in the past. It took more than a catchy logo or a snazzy slogan, right? That’s because branding is more than just visuals. Nonprofit branding has to simultaneously convince the heart and the head that your organization is worth supporting, and the best way to do that is a twofold approach: be clear and transparent with your mission, vision, values, and impact, and personalize your branding with authentic stories.

We don’t mean write a fairytale about your business, here. And it doesn’t have to be just words, either; video is a storytelling method that’s highly impactful. For example, if your nonprofit benefits a specific group, interview a member. Tell a story of how your donation or work with that group has changed their experience. Or, conversely, let a volunteer of your organization talk about how working with you has changed their lives for the better.

Share donor stories, too. Why did people choose to support you financially? These reasons can often be deeply personal and reach out to others who live similar lives. Because nonprofit branding and organizational loyalty is often deeply tied to the emotional response of your audience, these stories can help you strengthen your support foundation and increase both your donations and your organic reach.

# Stand out from the crowd

Why you? This is a question you have to ask yourself, because it’s a question donors and supporters are asking themselves when they’re deciding what organizations they want to support. What makes your nonprofit different than others in your sector?

If you’re the only nonprofit working on a cause, standing out from the crowd is easy. But more often than not you’ll be one nonprofit in a crowd. Take the cause of clean water, for example; there are hundreds of nonprofits working towards this goal, each with different approaches and focuses that key them in to specific supporters.

So what about your brand? What about your business? What sets your nonprofit apart? Some key questions to ask yourself can include:

* What’s your method? – Do you use a different method than other organizations? Are you targeting different solutions?
* What’s your goal? – Is your goal different than other nonprofits? For example, some clean water organizations are built around well construction, while others focus on partnering with organizations local to the need to devise in-home solutions, or specifically bring water to schools to encourage education. Still others look at the overall impact of water and tie in hygiene development and consistency. So what’s your branding goal? What would be a success to your organization?
* What’s your identity? – Is your core identity different than other nonprofits in your sector? Do you communicate your mission, vision, and values in a way that shows this difference? Are you consistent with that branding and communication?

Tying this back to our previous point, storytelling can also be a great way to highlight your nonprofit and how it differs from others in the area. Figuring out what makes you unique and using that to your advantage can help bring your message to life and ensure it resonates with your audience.

# Consistency is key

Your brand is more than just your logo, your slogan, or your graphic design. But don’t think those aren’t important. Being consistent in how you present yourself links your visual brand with the emotional message you’re conveying and helps build on-sight recognition with your core values. If you’re creating a brand with impact, the visuals should be impactful as well.

A skilled [branding agency](https://919marketing.com/branding-agency/), like 919 Marketing, can help bring your entire nonprofit brand strategy to life. As nonprofit branding continues to transition from being external communications-based to being something that can impact your entire organization, internally and externally, it’s more important than ever to know that you’re consistent across all levels of your nonprofit.