

**Getting what your nonprofit needs — funding, staff, and more — means showing how working with you can be a win-win.** By [Jack Soares](#)

## Show the community how your mission creates value for all involved.

### 1. Look for the (mission-related) win-win.

Most nonprofit organizations are created to fill a need. It's summarized (hopefully) in the mission statement — and should be reflected in the short- and long-term goals. *Preserve our historic heritage. Save the kookaburra. Reunite Pangea.* As admirable as those goals may be, parsing them out to potential supporters in terms of organizational value may be less compelling than presenting the same goals in terms of benefit to the donor. Relating donor desires to your mission is really just a matter of framing.



Take a look at the following statement: "We want to raise \$3 trillion to bring the supercontinent back together." Now, compare it to: "By helping us reunite Pangea, air travel — one of the major contributors to global warming — will be drastically reduced because you'll be able to drive your electric vehicle or take the train to Europe, Hawaii, and even Japan." Ridiculous though it might be, the latter framing posits a direct benefit to donors, although it's facilitated by your organization. Rather than saying "we need your help," say "Help us help you reunite Pangea [enter your specific message]."

Basically, you are thinking about what the donors want and then trying to link that to what you have. Of course, sometimes what you have is, in and of itself, a course correction after a misstep (which brings me to my next point).

### 2. Find a way to use your missteps.

A teeny, tiny nonprofit I volunteer with decided selling logoed T-shirts at our tool sales would be a great fundraiser. All the elements were there: a volunteer with graphic arts skills, a staff member with a silk-screening degree, and a cadre of volunteers willing to get their hands inky. A load of T-shirts were purchased in a variety of colors, styles, and sizes. A price (\$18) was decided upon that seemed both fair and supportive of the goal (fundraising). Then the sales began — or should have.

As it turned out, three factors hadn't been anticipated: We didn't have a wide enough buyer base, we couldn't get a bigger audience, and we hadn't answered the question: "why buy an \$18 T-shirt when you could buy a boxload of tools for less?" The unsold shirts took up space (and money). It's not hard to see why the T-shirt fundraiser was a bust. After all, it didn't provide any individualized value to prospective donors.

But from another perspective, the T-shirts themselves had a kind of value: visibility. People can't donate to your organization if they don't know it exists. If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around, noise doesn't matter; it still won't generate any donations.

A solution (rarely is there just one) was to drop the sale price of the T-shirts to \$5 (covering costs and a tad more) and sell a bazillion (okay, several hundred) of them. A subsequent "traveling T-shirts" project we've implemented suggests that purchasers send photos of themselves (and any T-shirt-wearing friends) in front of interesting places. So far the shirts have been pictured at the Forum in Rome, on an English beach, at a Swedish train station, under a palm tree in Puerto Vallarta, and in an intermittent Death Valley lake. Armed with T-shirts, emissaries (okay, vacationers) are on their way to Wales and Ireland. More are promised.

Even though this seems like a deviation from Jeremy's philosophy, it actually represents the same impulse. We found something our donors wanted: fun<sup>1</sup> — and maybe a sense of community. Sometimes it's as simple — and powerful — as that.

### **3. Get up close and personal.**

The best way to tell prospective supporters about your organization is face-to-face. The challenge is that if you approach people on the street and begin extolling your nonprofit's virtues, most will ignore you. Others may express displeasure in less-than-positive ways.

A solution that has all of the benefits (and more) but none of the negatives (usually) of sidewalk encounters: public speaking engagements.<sup>2</sup> Although it can cause sweaty palms and a stomach-load of butterflies, talking to a group is an easy way to get the word out. Public speaking also allows you to answer questions and interact with your audience, humanizing both you and your organization.

So where do you find audiences?<sup>3</sup> Heed Jeremy's advice. In almost every city (or town or wide spot in the road) there are innumerable service clubs: Rotary, Lions, Eagles, Optimists, Sons (or Daughters) of Moose, etc. Most have regularly scheduled meetings, some even weekly. Many have a guest speaker as part of the program.

Now imagine you're the program chair, and you have to find a speaker for every meeting, in perpetuity. After harvesting the low-hanging fruit for the first dozen meetings, the program chair might be running low on ideas. That's where you (and Jeremy) come in. That is, your call or email offering to come talk about your organization might be a relief.

Of course, you can control how many of these offers you make and in what geography. Generally, it's good to start small but think big. I've spoken to hundreds of audiences, some as small as a handful, once to some 1,200 — and I still get butterflies. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

If your organization's work falls into the human services category, it's worth looking into the United Way and Combined Federal Campaign. There's paperwork and conditions that have to be met, but there are often hundreds of worksite campaigns, many of which request a speaker. Here, Jeremy might suggest that you consider the plight of the oft-harried person in charge of the combined campaign's speakers bureau and offer to take on any speaking assignment (anytime, anywhere) in their service area. A word of caution: one year I ended up talking at a car assembly plant's midnight shift change on Halloween. It's not always the best use of your time.

#### 4. Paper or plastic?

If speaking at a service club's luncheon isn't your cup of tea (or plate of rubber chicken), there's always the written word.

Don't have a large, in-house list to send email or snail-mail to? Lack funding to buy a list of tappable prospects? Look at print media (what used to be called "newspapers") through Jeremy's lens. Although their number is dwindling, they're still out there. Many happily accept submissions (what used to be called "press releases"). Pitching story ideas to reporters who've done articles related to your mission makes the contact easier.<sup>4</sup> Some papers print guest editorials or opinion pieces — even a letter to the editor can garner attention.

Then there are online newsletters (like the one you're reading right now)<sup>5</sup> and other outlets. Share the articles with your supporters and potential supporters. The more eyes you can get on you, the better.

To E or not to E: Electronic communication is faster and cheaper than the paper version. A website can be a great attention-getter but, like a houseplant, it needs attention or it withers and dies. How appealing is a website that isn't routinely freshened up with new content or new graphics? A calendar of coming events can attract and involve potential supporters — but it needs constant updating. Listings can link to detailed info, photos of recent events, volunteer signups, donation forms, or event reservations, but out-of-date postings put the slippery on the slope.

#### 5. Piggyback.

Sometimes someone else has done at least some of the heavy lifting necessary to boost attention for your nonprofit. There's already a buzz around Giving Tuesday, so hop on the bandwagon.

On the other hand, almost every day of the year has been registered as "National (Something) Day." Some days are crowded with multiple observances, but if you can't find one to piggyback on, [you can register your own](#).

Want to go big? No reason not to have your own "National (Your Choice) Month." You'll be right up there with mentoring, fire prevention, and ice cream.

Many politicians will also happily issue a proclamation declaring "(Your Organization) Day" in their territory — be it city, county, or state. State and national legislators use this to bond with their constituents by presenting resolutions that honor nonprofits. You just have to ask — and do it with conviction.

#### 6. Keep it simple.

Let's go old school: If you have business cards, use them. If you don't have any, get some. Hand them out to everyone you meet. It often prompts them to reciprocate, giving you contact info for your prospective donors list. When I receive a business card, I jot down when and where I met the person as well as any pertinent facts. A quick 'good to meet you' email can reinforce the contact. Make sure you're also giving personalized business cards to board members and other key volunteers: it'll remind them to spread the word. Remember to frame it so they know what's in it for them: bragging rights without seeming to brag.

If you have voicemail, change your message frequently, ideally with some short message related to your mission. When I worked for the Girl Scouts, for example, I changed my message every day, picking [a daily fact](#) that connected to girls or women: “On this day in 1923, Amelia Earhart earned her pilots license.” More than one caller expressed disappointment when I answered the phone: “I was hoping to hear the fact of the day.”

## **7. All the world’s a stage.**

Step outside the box and take a long look at your nonprofit from Jeremy’s perspective. Although not everyone might be passionate about reuniting Pangea, there are probably things that you can share that would have value — and therefore attract — others. Put another way: what do you do that is shareable? Do you train volunteers to do public speaking — totally shareable. Can you offer virtual tours of Pangea before the breakup — shareable. You can teach American Sign Language or basic skills classes, provide virtual tours of recently rehabbed trails (or trails needing work), or just about anything else.

The aforementioned teeny, tool-oriented nonprofit decided to make [some short videos](#) on how to safely use a few popular tools from the tool library we support. Done unscripted on the fly, the [most popular one](#) has logged almost 180,000 views on YouTube. With a little practice, readily available apps make this sort of thing relatively easy and can certainly broaden your base. If you decide to do videos, let people know you’ve done them with mentions on your website, in your newsletters, and even in postscripts on your thank-you letters.

## **8. Many hands make light work.**

Maybe it’s time for a reality check. “Great,” you say. “You’ve given me a bunch of ideas, but who’s got the time to do all this stuff?”

Although simple solutions are sometimes suspect, here’s one: volunteers. In the nonprofits I’ve been associated with — both as staff and volunteer — these unpaid staff members have done everything from setting policies to building cabins, selling used tools, and running major events. They’re out there.<sup>6</sup> So how do you find them? Of course, you can post want ads on your newsletter and website. You can list with your local volunteer bureau as well as include calls in your public speaking scripts. You can even print a note on the back of your business cards. Basically, put them everywhere.

The trick in any recruitment effort is to spark people’s imagination. Remember the Navy’s ad campaign: “Join the Navy and see the world!” Consider enticing prospective volunteers with skill-building opportunities, including opportunities to flex skills they already have (skills are a muscle, after all).

And sometimes volunteering is required. High school students might be required to log volunteer hours before graduating. Boy Scouts have Eagle Scout projects. Girl Scouts have the Gold Award. Clubs (including those associated with local universities) take on service projects. So when you’re speaking to audiences, make sure you regard them as prospective volunteers.