

# W24

*A well-executed direct-mail program can generate loyal supporters, rapid growth, and increased working capital cost-effectively.*

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## **5** pointers on direct-mail fundraising

Individual Americans now give more than \$100 billion a year to nonprofit organizations.

Most of their donations come from letters they receive in the mail, the Association of Direct Response Fundraising Counsel reports. However, the Association observes, many nonprofits are unrealistic about the results direct mailings can generate for them.

“If their mailing doesn’t make a profit, or doesn’t make at least a 1% return (as they have always heard a mailing should), they conclude direct mail just isn’t for them,” the Association says — which robs their organizations of all the benefits a well-executed mailing program could produce. Better, the Association notes:

### ■ **Ask if direct mail is right for your cause**

If two out of three reputable fundraising consultants advise that you can employ direct mail to raise funds, your chances of success are strong. If two or three warn you away from direct mail, don’t waste time looking for a consultant who will tell you what you wish to hear (they do exist).

### ■ **Test lists rigorously**

Testing is the only way to find out if you have a sustainable market for your funds appeal.

Test at least 3,000 names from each of 10 to 20 lists. You can rent those names, or trade your own file of names with cousin organizations. Renting names costs a lot of money — but only a fraction of what you could lose by mailing in the dark.

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### ■ **Test mailing packages and offers**

Once you have identified lists that should produce for you, develop two or more offers, expressed in at least two creative packages.

### ■ **Roll out mailings of winning packages**

Do not fall victim to the temptation of mailing to every name on every list you have tested successfully. Mail first to the best segments of selected lists. Then, over time, mail to lesser segments — until you find the point of diminishing returns.

Above all, do not expect to do more than break even with these mailings. Their purpose is to generate donor names for your “house” file. The cost of acquiring them will be more than justified by the net profits of long-term farming of your organization’s donor file.

### ■ **Cultivate your donor list**

If you cultivate your house file carefully, you can persuade many donors to contribute two, three, or more times a year. Some will become “major” donors in the six figures.

Keep your donors informed and enthused by contacting them, not necessarily in order to ask them for further contributions, several times a year. Use thank-you letters, newsletters, results reports, and similar devices.

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