



RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL CHARITY FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Running a successful fundraising campaign in Canada in 2026 requires strategic clarity, disciplined execution, and a genuine commitment to long-term donor relationships. The fundraising environment has never been more demanding: a declining donor base, rising operating costs, economic uncertainty, and increasing competition for donor attention have combined to place extraordinary pressure on charitable organizations of all sizes.

This report provides a practical, data-driven guide to campaign fundraising for Canadian charities. Drawing on CRA filings across the registered charitable sector, it addresses the two principal types of fundraising campaigns available to charities, the disciplines that underpin successful execution of either, and the economics that govern organizational accountability. It also examines the growing but underutilized practice of third-party and external fundraising as a means of extending organizational reach.

The report covers the following areas:

- The distinction between Capital Campaigns and Annual Campaigns, and why establishing campaign purpose is the most consequential decision a charity makes before launching
- The core disciplines of successful campaigns: goal setting, the case for support, donor segmentation and prospecting, timeline and execution, and stewardship
- The economics of fundraising, including CRA cost ratio benchmarks and sector-level expenditure data
- The risks and opportunities of engaging external and third-party fundraisers

Principle conclusions of the Report

- The most consequential decision a charitable organization makes before launching a fundraising campaign is establishing its purpose. The failure to distinguish between a capital campaign and an annual campaign before committing resources is one of the most common and costly errors in the sector.
- Annual campaigns serve a fundamentally different purpose: sustaining and growing the organization's ability to deliver on its mission year after year. As the pool of Canadian donors has diminished, organizations must treat donor acquisition as a primary campaign goal alongside retention, not a secondary one.
- Recurring giving programs deserve particular strategic emphasis. Monthly donors provide predictable, sustainable revenue, have significantly higher lifetime value than one-time donors, and consistently report stronger emotional connection to the organizations they support.
- Fundraising expenditure is heavily concentrated among large charities. Organizations with revenues of \$1 million or more represent only 40 percent of charities reporting fundraising expenses but account for 93 percent of total fundraising dollars spent – pointing to a significant opportunity for smaller organizations to close the gap through more deliberate planning and cost management.
- Ontario dominates sector fundraising expenditure, accounting for 52.5 percent of total sector spending – approximately \$1.21 billion of the \$2.30 billion annual total – a share disproportionately large relative to its representation in the sector, reflecting larger average organization size and more mature fundraising infrastructure.

- Only 2.6 percent of registered Canadian charities reported using a commercial external fundraiser in their most recent fiscal year. This points not to a ceiling, but to an underutilized opportunity – particularly for smaller organizations that lack internal campaign capacity. Of those that do use external fundraisers, 64 percent have total revenues below \$1 million.
- Canadian charities retain full legal and regulatory responsibility for all fundraising conducted in their name, including by third parties. Written agreements must be in place before work begins, donor data must be handled in accordance with applicable privacy legislation, and all arrangements must be disclosed on the charity's annual CRA return.
- Poor stewardship is one of the primary drivers of donor attrition in the sector. The organizations that treat donors as long-term partners – not short-term sources of revenue – consistently outperform those that do not.

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Our Vision

We will participate in a thriving Canadian philanthropic sector where the most impactful charities with the highest governance standards are celebrated and supported by donor capital.

Our Mission

The Veritas Foundation aims to be Canada's authoritative source for participating in the country's charitable sector and evaluating its effectiveness and impact.



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