

Marketing That Actually Moves Donors

Turning Attention into Action.

Laura Holloway

Monday, June 22 | 3:00–4:15 pm



bigsea.co



Your Guide Today:

Laura Holloway

Director of Marketing Strategy · Big Sea

- Marketing & strategy agency serving nonprofits, cultural orgs, and higher ed since 2005
- Deep expertise in donor communications, fundraising strategy, and digital campaigns
- Catalyst for those committed to making a difference

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big sea

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that move people.**

Strategy • Digital Marketing • Storytelling
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Corporation

This company is part of the global movement for an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economic system.

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SHOW OF HANDS:

Which best describes your role?

A

**Marketing &
Communications**

B

**Fundraising &
Development**

C

**Executive
Leadership**

D

**All of the
Above (lucky!)**

We'll come back to how your role shapes your marketing strategy.

Here's the truth nobody says out loud:

**Attention is
not the goal.
Action is.**

And the gap between them is where most nonprofit marketing gets lost.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION — 90 SECONDS

Before we build forward, let's name what's not working.

What was the goal?

Raise \$ / Increase awareness / Drive event attendance / Other:

What actually happened?

Results, response rate, feedback you got:

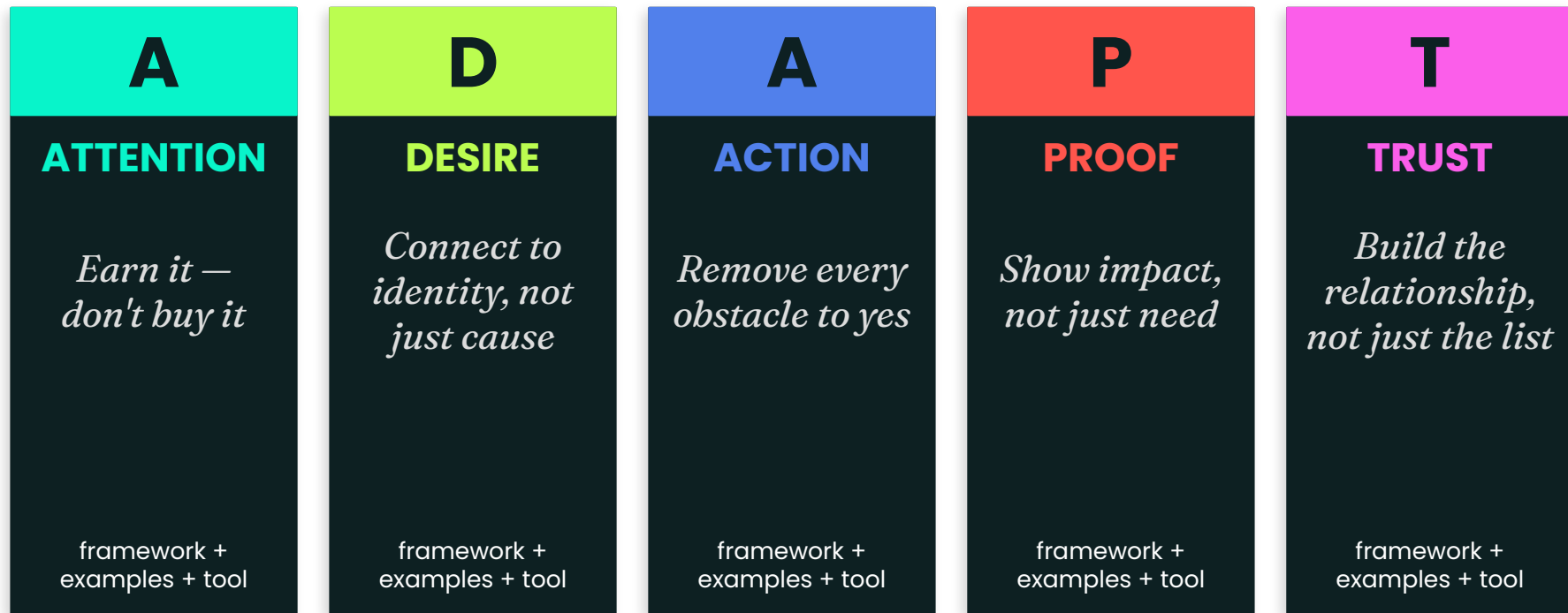
Where did it fall short?

Not enough opens? Clicks but no conversions? Donors didn't respond?

Think of a recent campaign, email, or fundraising appeal.

Today's Framework

THE **A-D-A-P-T** MODEL · 5 principles · immediate application · real tools you leave with.



Each section: framework · real examples · a tool you apply before we move on

A

01:
ATTENTION

Earn it.

Don't buy it.

In a world of infinite scroll, what makes a donor actually stop?



The Donor's World in 2026

8 sec

Average human
attention span

127

Marketing messages
per day

3%

Avg nonprofit
email open rate

4 triggers that make donors stop:

SURPRISE

Disrupts the expected pattern — unexpected image, counterintuitive headline

RECOGNITION

"That's me" — mirrors the reader's identity back to them

OPEN LOOP

Creates a question the brain needs to resolve — compels them to keep reading

RELEVANCE

Right message, right person, right moment — segmentation is a superpower

These are empathy, translated into strategy.

Real Subject Lines — Stop-Scroll vs. Scroll-Past

SCROLL PAST

Our Annual Fund is open!

Year-End Giving — Please Donate

Update: Our Programs Need You

Help Us Reach Our Goal!



STOP SCROLL

We almost lost her. Here's what you made possible.

You're the reason we kept the lights on last year.

What happens when a donor disappears? We found out.

She was going to leave. Then someone like you stepped in.

EXERCISE — 4 MINUTES

The Subject Line Rewrite

1 min

Part 1

Write down your most recent fundraising email subject line:

2 min

Part 2

Rewrite it using at least one trigger: Surprise / Recognition / Open Loop / Relevance

1 min

Part 3

Hands up — who wants to share? We'll hear 3 from the room.

PAIR SHARE — 2 MINUTES

Turn to your neighbor.

Share your rewrite.

Which stop-scroll trigger did you use — and why does it fit your audience?

Bonus: What does your neighbor's rewrite make you want to steal for your own org?



2 minutes • Then we'll hear 2 pairs share back with the room.

A · ATTENTION · Key Takeaway

**"The first job of your
marketing is to be seen."**

Everything else comes after.



D

02:
DESIRE

Connect to identity, **not just cause.**

*Donors don't give because you need money.
They give because of who they believe they are.*

Two Ways to Talk About the Same Gift

ORG-CENTRIC

We need your help to fund our programs.

Donate today to keep our doors open.

Our organization serves 500 families a year.



IDENTITY-LED

Because of people like you, kids in our city have a place to go after school.

You're the reason our doors stay open — and they need you again this year.

500 families. Each one changed by a neighbor who decided to act.

The shift isn't about spin. It's about truth-telling from the right point of view.

LIVE POLL

Which email would YOU open?

A

*"Help us reach our
year-end goal!"*

B

***"You're the reason
we kept the lights on.
They need you again."***

Raise your hand — or think about it honestly.

Why does B win? **Because it's about the reader, not the organization.**

EXERCISE — 3 MINUTES

Write Your Donor Identity Statement

The most powerful sentence in your fundraising isn't about your org — it's about who your donor is.

"You are the kind of person who

_____."

Write a version that's true for your most loyal donor:

Your version:

Raise your hand if yours surprised you. (Hint: it should — we rarely write this down.)

PAIR SHARE — 2 MINUTES

Read yours to your neighbor.

Does it sound true?

Does it make your neighbor want to be that kind of person?

If it doesn't feel true or resonant yet, keep working it. The best ones take a few tries.



2 minutes · Then we'll hear 2 pairs share back with the room.

**"The most powerful
sentence in your marketing
isn't about your org."**

It's about your donor.

A

03 :
ACTION

Remove every obstacle to **yes.**

*Friction kills conversions.
Every extra click is a vote to leave.*



The Friction Audit

5 places donors abandon the gift — and what to do instead

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Landing page doesn't match the email | → | Mirror the headline + image from email to landing page |
| 2 | Too many form fields | → | Name + email + amount = done. Everything else is friction |
| 3 | Unclear impact of the gift amount | → | "\$50 feeds a family for a week" beats any generic ask |
| 4 | No mobile optimization | → | 67% of emails open on phones. Test yours right now. |
| 5 | No urgency or reason to act now | → | Deadlines, matches, and goals create action triggers |

LIVE EXERCISE + POLL — 3 MINUTES

Pull up your donate page right now.

- 1 How many form fields does it have? (More than 5 is too many.)
- 2 Is there a compelling headline — or just a logo and a generic ask?
- 3 Does each gift amount show what it actually does?
- 4 Does it work on mobile? Really? (Open it on your phone.)

SHOW OF HANDS:

How many friction points did you find?

0-1 | 2-3 | 4 or more (no shame — most orgs find 4+)

The 3-Part Test for a High-Converting Donate Page

01

The Mirror Test

Does your landing page headline match the email that sent donors there? If the email says "Help Maria" and the page says "Donate Now," you lost them in the jump.

02

The Mobile Test

Open your donate page on your phone. Can you complete the gift in under 60 seconds? If not, you're losing 67% of your email audience.

03

The Impact Test

Does every gift amount tell a donor what it actually does? "\$50" means nothing. "\$50 feeds a family for a week" creates a decision.

PAIR SHARE — 1 MINUTE

Tell your neighbor.

What's the #1 friction point on your donate page?

And what would it take to fix it this week?

Quick wins beat perfect plans. Pick one thing you can change before you leave this conference.



1 minute · Quick share back — who found the most friction?

A · ACTION · Key Takeaway

**"Every extra click
is a vote to leave."**

Your job is to make yes effortless.

P

04 :
PROOF

**Show impact,
not just need.**

Donors fund hope, not desperation.



The Proof Hierarchy

How you prove impact changes how much donors trust — and give.

1

Lowest: Statistics alone

"We served 4,200 people last year."

2

Better: Statistics + outcome

"4,200 people found housing. 78% stayed housed for over a year."

3

Best: One real story

"Maria spent 14 months in our program. Last month, she signed her first lease."

4

Most powerful: Story + donor role

"Maria's lease was possible because of people exactly like you."

See the Difference · Level 1 vs. Level 4

LEVEL 1

Statistics alone

"Last year, our food bank distributed 147,000 meals to families in need across 12 counties.

We need your support to continue this vital work. Please donate today."

Reader feels: informed, but unmoved

LEVEL 4

Story + donor role

"Marcus hadn't eaten a hot meal in four days. Then he walked through our doors.

Last Tuesday, he sat down to his 147,000th meal — the one your neighborhood made possible.

You're the reason he came back."

Reader feels: seen, moved, needed

EXERCISE — 4 MINUTES

Draft Your Level-4 Proof Statement

Think of one real person or community your work changed.

Who:

Name or description of the person / community

What changed:

Before your org / after your org

The donor's role:

"This happened because someone like you decided to..."

Bonus: *Does your current website have a Level-4 story? Raise your hand if yes.*

PAIR SHARE — 2 MINUTES

Read your Level-4 to your partner.

Does it give you chills?

Does it make the donor feel like the hero of the story?

If the donor doesn't feel essential to the story, it's not Level 4 yet. Keep them in it.



2 minutes · Then we'll share out 1–2 of the strongest.

P · PROOF · Key Takeaway

**"Data earns credibility.
Story earns action."**

Together, they earn trust.



T

05 :
TRUST

**Build the relationship,
not just the list.**

The goal isn't more donors. It's donors who stay.

Why Retention Is the Highest-ROI Strategy You're Probably Ignoring

43%

Average nonprofit donor retention rate

That means 57 of every 100 donors you acquired last year won't give again.

Improving retention by just 10% can double lifetime donor value.

- **A personal thank-you within 24 hours — not a receipt**
- **Donor anniversary: 'A year ago, you changed this'**

- **Impact updates: show what happened, not what you need**
- **A message that asks for NOTHING (radical, but powerful)**

Insider content: 'As a donor, here's what you should know'

PAIR SHARE — 2 MINUTES

What's your biggest retention gap?

Which of the 5 non-ask touchpoints is your org completely missing?

What's one you could add this month?

The non-ask is the secret weapon most orgs skip because it feels counterintuitive.



2 minutes · Then we'll hear what the room is missing most.

**"The best donor
acquisition strategy
is retention."**

***Keep the donors you have.
Everything else follows.***

FINAL REFLECTION — 3 MINUTES

Your Monday Morning Commitment

Pick ONE action from the A-D-A-P-T model. Write it down. Make it specific enough to do by noon on Monday.

A Rewrite my next email subject line using a stop-scroll trigger

D Draft a donor identity statement for our most loyal segment

A Remove 3 friction points from our donate page this week

P Write one Level-4 story to use in our next appeal

T Schedule a non-ask touchpoint for donors from the last 90 days

Circle yours. Write your exact next step at the bottom of your notes.

SHOW OF HANDS — FINAL POLL

Which ADAPT step are you most ready to act on?

A

ATTENTION

D

DESIRE

A

ACTION

P

PROOF

T

TRUST

*Whoever sits next to you — make sure they know your answer. **Accountability starts now.***

What You're Leaving With

Scan any QR code to access your resources.



Today's Presentation

Download today's full presentation



ADAPT Worksheet

Fillable PDF — all 5 exercises in one doc



Nonprofit Storytelling Guide

A free guide for you!



AI for Nonprofits

A free guide for you!

Let's keep the conversation going...

Big Sea works with nonprofits, cultural institutions, and educational orgs to build marketing that actually moves people.

DONOR COMMUNICATIONS

EMAIL STRATEGY

FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

WEBSITE DESIGN & DEV

CONTENT MARKETING

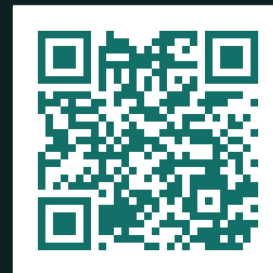
DIGITAL STRATEGY

Connect with Laura:

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You already have **what it takes.**

The donors are out there.

The mission is real.

Now the marketing just has to match.

Laura Holloway

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