

Introduction: Nonprofit Marketing Calendar Guide

An introduction to the five principles that separate a working marketing calendar from one that stops working by February.

FULL GUIDE AND PLANNING TOOLS AT [SANTAFEMARKETING.COM/RESOURCES](https://santafemarketing.com/resources)

SANTA FE MARKETING / RESOURCE SERIES

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About this Guide

This is a conceptual introduction, not a complete planning resource. It presents five structural principles that determine whether a nonprofit marketing calendar will hold together across a full year or quietly fall apart by late winter.

The principles here are diagnostic. They help an organization identify where its current calendar breaks down and why. The full companion guide, available at santafemarketing.com/resources, translates each principle into planning tables, vendor timelines, audience cadence frameworks, and a downloadable calendar template.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Read this introduction to understand the structural logic behind a year-round marketing calendar. Use the reflection questions to assess where your organization stands today. Then move to the full guide and companion template when you are ready to build.

The Core Observation

Most nonprofit marketing calendars are designed around content production: what to post, when to send, which campaigns to run. That approach works in January. By February, events shift, grant deadlines consume staff time, and donor follow-up from December gets delayed. The calendar drifts because it was built around what the organization wanted to say, not when audiences were ready to hear it.

A calendar that lasts the year is built on a different foundation. It accounts for audience behavior, vendor lead times, funding cycles, and the relationship between fundraising and marketing activity. The five principles that follow identify the structural elements that make that possible.

OVERVIEW

Five Structural Principles

Each principle addresses a specific structural gap that causes nonprofit calendars to lose coherence over the course of a year. They are ordered from the most foundational coordination problem to the most time-sensitive planning challenge.

01

Share One Calendar

Development and marketing operate on separate calendars in most organizations. Appeals compete with promotions. Year-end emails collide with membership renewals. The first structural fix is a single shared planning document.

02

Match Communication to Audience

Donors, members, general audiences, press, and board each require different message types at different frequencies. A calendar that treats them as one list will fatigue the most engaged segments first.

03

Include Vendor Timelines

Print deadlines, broadcast windows, co-op application cycles, and press lead times are invisible on most calendars. When they are missing, the team manages them reactively, at higher cost and lower quality.

04

Maintain Google Ad Grants Monthly

The \$10,000/month search advertising credit available to qualifying nonprofits requires ongoing attention to maintain compliance and spend effectively. Organizations that set it up once consistently underperform.

05

Start Year-End Cultivation in September

The highest-stakes fundraising period of the year cannot begin in November. Effective year-end campaigns are the result of three to four months of donor cultivation, not a sudden December ask.

PRINCIPLE 01

Fundraising and Marketing Must Share One Calendar

When development and marketing maintain separate calendars, neither team sees the full picture of what the organization is asking its audiences to do in a given week. A donor appeal launches alongside a ticket promotion. A grant report consumes the same staff bandwidth as a spring campaign. The communications stack up, and the audience experiences them as noise.

The fix is not a technology problem. It is a coordination decision: one shared calendar document, maintained by both teams, with a single person who holds authority to flag conflicts and enforce sequencing. When every communication, campaign, and donor touchpoint lives in the same view, conflicts become visible before they reach an inbox.

REFLECTION

Where do your fundraising and marketing calendars currently overlap?
Who in your organization has the authority to resolve scheduling conflicts between development and marketing sends?

PRINCIPLE 02

Each Audience Requires a Different Rhythm

A nonprofit typically communicates with at least five distinct audiences: general/public, donors, members, press, and board. Each has a different relationship with the organization and a different tolerance for frequency and message type.

Donors respond to impact stories. Members want early access. Press contacts need brevity and long lead times. Board members need a structured summary, not a stream of updates. Sending the same message to all five groups at the same frequency is the most common reason email lists fatigue and unsubscribe rates climb. The full guide includes an audience-by-channel frequency matrix to help structure this.

REFLECTION

How many distinct audience segments does your organization currently communicate with separately? Which segment is most underserved by your current cadence?

PRINCIPLE 03

Vendor Timelines Belong on the Calendar

Marketing calendars typically track what the organization plans to say and when. They rarely track when vendors need to hear from the organization. Print production, broadcast negotiation, co-op marketing applications, and press kit distribution all operate on fixed lead times. Missing a deadline means rushing at a premium or missing the window entirely.

The principle is backward-mapping: start from the public date of any deliverable and work backward to the vendor deadline. When that deadline appears on the shared calendar, the team sees the true workload, not just the publishing schedule. The full guide includes a vendor lead time reference table with typical windows for each vendor type.

REFLECTION

Which vendor relationships are you currently managing reactively? Which vendor deadline has caused the most disruption in the past year?

PRINCIPLE 04

Google Ad Grants Require Monthly Calendar Presence

Google Ad Grants provides qualifying nonprofits with up to \$10,000 per month in search advertising credits. The program rewards consistent attention and penalizes inattention with reduced impressions and, eventually, account suspension.

Every month should include at least one Ad Grants task: keyword adjustments, campaign alignment with current programming, compliance checks, and spend optimization during high-traffic periods. The full guide includes a 12-month recommended activity calendar. A separate Resource Series guide (Guide 01) covers the complete program walkthrough.

REFLECTION

Is your organization currently using Google Ad Grants? If so, does your calendar include monthly management tasks for the program?

PRINCIPLE 05

Year-End Giving Begins in September

Year-end giving is the highest-stakes fundraising period for most cultural nonprofits. The window from Thanksgiving through December 31 is competitive and unforgiving of late starts. Organizations that enter December without a cultivated donor list and a sequenced email plan consistently underperform.

Cultivation is not a fundraising technique. It is the sustained practice of sharing impact, building relationships, and demonstrating stewardship before making an ask. When December arrives with three to four months of cultivation behind it, the ask is a continuation of an ongoing conversation. When it arrives cold, it is a surprise. The full guide includes a month-by-month cultivation-to-close sequence.

REFLECTION

When does your donor cultivation for year-end currently begin? Do you have a sequenced email plan for December, or does it come together ad hoc?

NEXT STEP

From Principles to Planning Tools

The five principles above are the conceptual foundation. They identify where nonprofit calendars typically break down and why. The companion guide and planning template translate these principles into tools you can act on immediately.

WHAT THE FULL GUIDE CONTAINS

TOOL	DESCRIPTION
Audience frequency matrix	Recommended email, social, and print cadence for each of five audience segments.
Vendor lead time reference	Typical timelines for print, broadcast, co-op applications, press, and photography vendors.
Google Ad Grants calendar	A 12-month view of recommended management activities aligned to seasonal patterns.
Cultivation-to-close sequence	A month-by-month year-end fundraising timeline from September through December 31.
Cultivation-to-close sequence	Downloadable calendar tool with annual overview, monthly grid, audience cadence guide, and vendor checklist.

DOWNLOAD THE FULL GUIDE AND COMPANION TEMPLATE[SANTAFEMARKETING.COM/RESOURCES](https://santafemarketing.com/resources)

Brian Bixby is a Fractional Director of Marketing & Communications serving nonprofit and cultural institutions in Santa Fe and New Mexico. This guide is part of a free resource series for organizations navigating marketing strategy without a full-time marketing department.

If your organization needs help building a marketing calendar, developing audience strategy, or establishing communications infrastructure, visit santafemarketing.com to start a conversation.