Delivering Our Message

A Brooklyn Org Study on the State of Local Nonprofit Communications and Recommendations for Growth

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BROOKLYN ORG

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Executive Summary

Based on sector-wide trends, conference insights, and our survey findings, we have compiled the best-practice recommendations below. BKO's capacity building resource library offers further communications and marketing support, including recordings from the 2026 BKO Nonprofit Conference: Communicating with Clarity, free graphic design platforms, and strategic upskilling workshops.

FOCUS THE STRATEGY

- **Define your goal(s) and audience(s), and target your messaging accordingly.** Whether the objective is donor retention, mission awareness, or a specific call-to-action, each has its own audiences, with their own preferred channels and the language and visuals that resonate with them. Plan targeted messaging intentionally, using the many tools available for multi-channel communications.
- **Be careful not to overextend.** Focus on a few active channels, like email campaigns and select social media platforms, and tailor messaging to each. Direct limited resources to where your audiences are, using metrics and anecdotal feedback to determine where and when to reach them.

CRAFT THE MESSAGE

- **Tell human-centered stories.** Emotional connections drive nonprofit engagement, and they come from sharing the experiences of beneficiaries and the organization's community impact. Visuals convey feeling best, so capture these stories with photos and video. Hire a photographer or videographer for high-leverage moments if resources permit, but don't dismiss quality content captured on a staffer's or client's phone.
- **Optimize communications for mobile consumption.** Most people read email, browse websites, and use social media on their smartphones. Make sure all digital communications display properly on mobile, use mobile-friendly templates, and keep messages brief and direct for shorter attention spans.
- **Connect fundraising appeals with impact messaging.** Showing in detail how a potential gift can make a real-world difference supports donor acquisition, just as showing how past gifts made a difference supports retention. Programmatic data, explained in plain language, can convey the statistical impact of your work.

BUILD A COMMUNICATIONS RHYTHM

- **Be predictable in your communications cadence.** Digital engagement is driven by repetition: content shared on a regular weekly, biweekly, or monthly pattern holds attention, while sporadic posting loses it. Posting doesn't need to be daily, just predictable. Keep a short calendar of upcoming messaging across channels, pre-draft when you can, and use scheduling tools to save time in busier stretches.

- **Track your efforts and ask for feedback.** Most email marketing and social media platforms offer free, built-in metrics, which are especially helpful for micro-organizations. Use them to learn which messages resonate and when to post. Every so often, perhaps annually, survey your audiences (beneficiaries, donors, etc.) to hear what they prefer.

STRENGTHEN THE INSIDE

- **Take the time for internal communications.** Whether by weekly email, a Slack channel, or a text thread, keep staff and board members engaged with the mission and informed about the work. Team members, especially those working directly with clients, donors, and community stakeholders, are communicators of the brand themselves; tap their experience for feedback on what messaging is and isn't landing. For sensitive communications, consider secure messaging applications.
- **Develop an internal AI policy for communications.** AI tools offer real uses and real pitfalls, and choosing to use them or not can both be reasonable; what matters is a shared, team-wide approach. Organizations that use AI should treat it like the "world's smartest intern" and always double-check its work. Authenticity of voice matters, and people can tell when communications lack the human touch.
- **Don't assume that more infrastructure means more agility.** Larger organizations should stay nimble and not let added decision-making layers slow rapid response. Where possible, treat rapid-response ability as an internal metric, and have communications and executive staff review whether approval processes need redesign.

EXTEND THE REACH

- **Engage local media and emerging influencers.** Brooklyn and New York City have a rich landscape of content creators looking for compelling nonprofit stories, and a single direct message on social media can open a valuable exposure or collaboration opportunity. Work with board members, staff, and supporters to map out meaningful relationships.
- **Partner with like-minded nonprofits.** Micro-organizations benefit from coalitions that amplify messages, share limited communications bandwidth, and grow awareness among like-minded audiences. Larger organizations benefit too, and can go further by serving as mentors or coalition anchors that extend their communications infrastructure to smaller peers.
- **Consider short-term capacity investments in long-term communications development.** Fractional or part-time hires, or shared consultant arrangements, can close capacity gaps for smaller nonprofits when tied to a defined plan, such as developing a social media strategy, creating storytelling content for future use, or drafting an issue advocacy campaign.

Some Cross-Cutting Takeaways

- **Reaching new donors is the sector's shared weak point.** It is the lowest-rated effectiveness item overall and within every subgroup examined, by age, budget, and issue area, regardless of resources.

- **There's a persistent internal/external clarity gap.** Organizations are far more confident that they understand their own brand (mean 4.69 out of 5) than that outside audiences understand them (mean 3.69 out of 5), across nearly every segment.

- **Budget size is the strongest predictor of communications capacity.** Staffing, consultant use, and metrics tracking all scale with budget far more consistently than with age, location, or issue area, though larger budgets don't guarantee higher self-rated effectiveness.

- **Emergent (5-10 years old) and immigrant-serving organizations stand out for operational maturity,** posting some of the highest effectiveness and internal communications scores without being the most resourced, which suggests process and cadence matter as much as budget.

- **Measurement remains underdeveloped everywhere.** Only 51% of organizations track communications metrics at all, and those that do typically review them only quarterly, across every age, budget, and issue-area group.

Introduction

Brooklyn is home to more than 13,000 registered nonprofits — nearly a third of all nonprofits in New York City, according to 2019 data from The Center for Nonprofit Strategy and Management (CNSM) in the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs at Baruch College. BKO has made it a central mission to redirect philanthropic attention toward these organizations. In **The Foundation for Our Future: How Brooklyn Org is Creating a New Philanthropic Model in the Heart of NYC's Cultural Capital,** published earlier this year, Brooklyn Org laid out a strategic vision centered on year-round local engagement: neighborhood listening events, community forums with elected officials, participatory grantmaking, and nonprofit capacity building.

Effective strategic communications is a key way to address nonprofits' underinvestment and capacity needs, amplifying growth, advocacy, program participation, and community awareness. It was the focus of the annual Brooklyn Org Nonprofit Conference in June 2026, Communicating with Clarity, where more than 200 nonprofit staff and board members gathered at St. Francis College with practitioners, strategists, legal experts, and community leaders to discuss the sector's shared communications challenges.

As a follow-up to the conference, BKO and Argus Strategies surveyed 86 local nonprofits about their communications: preferred methods with clients, donors, and staff; time and budget spent; outreach frequency across channels; use of metrics; and a self-assessment of their effectiveness.

The results show where the borough's nonprofits share internal and external messaging practices and highlight emerging trends. Together with comparable national data, they inform the best-practice recommendations in this white paper and will guide the capacity building support BKO and its partners provide going forward.

Communications: A 30,000 Foot-View in 2026

Communications is a constantly evolving discipline. The last couple of decades have brought major shifts in the platforms people turn to for content, along with new struggles for brand and organizational trust amid disinformation and information security risks.

Nonprofits seeking earned media must contend with fewer traditional print and radio outlets, reporters, and resources for news coverage, a loss felt especially by older populations. At the same time, digital channels from web-based journalism to social media to podcasts have multiplied, opening the door to content ranging from thought leadership on LinkedIn and Substack to visual creative on Instagram and YouTube. For nonprofits with tech-savvy staff or consultants, these channels can support calls-to-action as varied as fundraising, political appeals, and volunteer recruitment.

More recently, vertical video has become dominant, particularly on short-form platforms, and creators and influencers with niche audiences can rival the impact of high-profile media placements. Corporate brands and government alike have taken notice; a recent Columbia

Journalism Review working paper explored the relationship between influencers and New York City Hall.

Email marketing software and constituent relationship management (CRM) systems have also proven vital. Email is a leading channel for reaching clients, donors, and supporters, with templates for newsletters, events, and promotions. Critically, email platforms enable metric-driven work: open and click-through rates let users adjust strategy based on quantitative feedback, as do the engagement data many social media and website platforms provide. CRM systems go further, enabling targeting and tracking of individual contacts, which is especially effective for organizations that integrate communications with fundraising and volunteer management.

Disinformation and information security are growing challenges, particularly for nonprofits whose missions involve political advocacy. Social media companies take differing approaches to monitoring harmful content and propaganda that could undermine a brand's credibility or endanger vulnerable populations. A recent Yale Insights study found that the "reward systems of social media platforms are inadvertently encouraging users to spread misinformation."

In response, some nonprofits have invested, as resources permit, in reputation management: monitoring brand mentions in the news and on social media, boosting search engine optimization (SEO), creating content that highlights their best work, and preparing rapid responses. In the current political climate, those decisions include whether to comment on hot-button topics that may not directly affect an organization but connect to its mission or resonate with its supporters. Some nonprofits have also moved internal and external communications to encrypted messaging apps.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) can support content drafting and editing, visual design, social media scheduling, and more. While AI use in the sector appears to be growing, many feel the concerns outweigh the benefits, from impersonal, generic messaging that damages connection to the security of organizational data and client stories on AI platforms.

Above all, capacity limits of budget, staff, and time shape most nonprofits' communications decisions. The majority of the country's nearly two million registered nonprofits are micro-organizations, with annual budgets under $100,000.

Brooklyn vs. Beyond: Nonprofit Communications in Context

For national context, we compare key survey metrics against the Nonprofit Marketing Guide (NPMG)'s annual Nonprofit Communications Trends Report, which surveys several hundred communications professionals.

The 2021 report found that 58% of nonprofits had between 0.5 and 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff responsible for communications and marketing, and the 2020 report found that 74% send an email newsletter or update at least monthly. For communications goals, 69% of 2026 respondents named participation levels among their top three success objectives,

64% fundraising results, 49% list/audience growth, and 45% loyalty or retention, while only 27% named a change in knowledge or understanding. The 2025 edition listed the top three communications challenges as a lack of time to produce quality content, a lack of budget for direct expenses, and an inability to measure effectiveness.

The report does not track the share of budgets dedicated to communications, but the 2024 edition notes that nearly 20 percent of organizations "don't have a specific budget but can 'find' money," suggesting gaps in administrative capacity, budgetary prioritization, or both.

Brooklyn-based nonprofits face unique strengths and difficulties in communications. Proximity to major New York City media outlets, journalists, content creators, and public relations (PR) agencies makes it easier to pitch stories and build press relationships, and gives access to a deep local pool of creative talent. The borough is also home to an array of community news outlets hungry for stories about local nonprofits, including media focused on specific neighborhoods, cultural backgrounds, and issue areas, as well as civic groups and institutions, online and on the ground, that offer cross-promotional opportunities to build brand awareness and program participation.

On the flip side, Brooklyn's thousands of nonprofits all compete for attention in local media, social media feeds, and shared community spaces, and Brooklynites receive many appeals to donate, volunteer, and attend events. The borough's language diversity makes translation and cultural adaptation resource-intensive. And the persistent digital divide in reliable Internet access and digital literacy among low-income residents, seniors, and immigrant families means online communications are often insufficient to reach the people nonprofits actually serve.

Insights from "Communicating with Clarity"

The 2026 BKO Nonprofit Conference: Communicating with Clarity focused on how nonprofits get their message out, build trust in their brands, and strengthen their teams' communications capacity. A key takeaway: strong communications are not a luxury. Amid funding challenges and other external pressures, effective communication is a core function that furthers existing programs and enables sustainable growth. Key insights from the day's panelists and speakers:

MISSION AND BRAND FOUNDATION

- Nonprofit leaders should build brand clarity with input from their staff, asking whether the brand is expressed clearly and consistently, whether teams understand and believe in it, and whether it stands apart from competitors. A strong brand tells a team what to say (and not say), lets it adapt without losing its identity, and builds trust with donors, partners, and communities.
- Internal communications help staff, who are themselves formal and informal communicators with key audiences, hold the mission with conviction. Weekly staff meetings are recommended to reground teams in the mission and share work that reflects it.
- Before commenting on public events that present risk, leaders should ask why they are speaking in that moment, whether the benefits outweigh the risks, and whether visibility in that moment is part of the mission.

AUDIENCE LISTENING AND RESPONSIVENESS

- Communications should reflect listening, responding directly to the voices of impacted communities and stakeholders, and should translate governmental, political, and social realities for everyday people.
- People want actionable news, practical information, and a sense of agency in making an impact; nonprofits should keep this in mind to spark engagement.
- Interview or survey audiences about how they would like to be reached.

STORYTELLING, VOICE, AND VISUAL CONTENT

- AI is a tool, not a replacement for human effort. It can serve as a first-round translator or research assistant, but its work must be verified and given human authenticity. Nonprofit communications need a human voice grounded in mission, not a generic one.
- Human-centered storytelling, particularly uplifting messages, drives traffic online. Social media can show not just clients' difficult realities today, but the hopeful path to where they want to go. Focus on messaging hope for each stakeholder, in diverse ways.

- Visuals speak loudly, especially to visual learners. Hiring a photographer is a strong first step in showing who an organization is and what it does, and nonprofits should make the most of their top brand-reinforcing images, especially on Instagram. Video is also a powerful storytelling tool, and authentic video is sometimes better than highly polished content.

CHANNEL STRATEGY AND RELATIONSHIP MAPPING

- Social media has become the dominant communications channel, and nonprofits seeking press attention need to look beyond legacy media coverage.
- Every organization has natural communications limits, whether from operational capacity, mission specificity, or stakeholder sensitivities. In those cases, coalitions that let allies lead the messaging are a strategic option.
- Board members and staff sometimes have meaningful relationships in traditional or new media, including with content creators and influencers. Communications teams should proactively map and leverage those relationships.

RISK, INVESTMENT, AND MEASUREMENT

- What is said to one audience doesn't necessarily stay with that audience; responsible communications help prevent weaponization.
- Nonprofits should consider investing in communications on its own, not only in support of development and fundraising, and should track what is and isn't resonating.
- Communications and marketing investments can't guarantee a "return on investment," and most of the return comes down the road. Part of the value is knowing the organization has put itself out there strategically with a clear message.

OVERALL SURVEY FINDINGS

Communications Staffing and Resources

Brooklyn nonprofits' capacity issues are especially evident in the staffing and resources they dedicate to communications.

28%
of organizations have staff dedicated full-time to communications

28%
use an external consultant to support communications

53%
use AI tools for communications, but only 17 of the 45 who answered have seen a clear engagement lift

44%
spend less than 5% of their budget on communications

Only 28% of organizations have staff dedicated full-time to communications, and most of those have just one such staff member (15 of 24). For the majority without dedicated staff, the executive director (ED) fills the gap (71%). EDs already carry exceptional workloads, especially at micro-organizations, and adding communications can slow rapid response and advance content planning. Among nonprofits without full-time communications staff, 37% have board members contribute, possibly drawing on relevant expertise, and 53% tap volunteers and interns, a low-cost strategy that brings fresh community perspectives but not always reliable availability or consistent quality. Many small and mid-sized nonprofits also blend fundraising and communications so that mission-driven storytelling flows directly into donor appeals, which could explain why 27% have a development director take on communications work.

BKO Survey Sample Snapshot

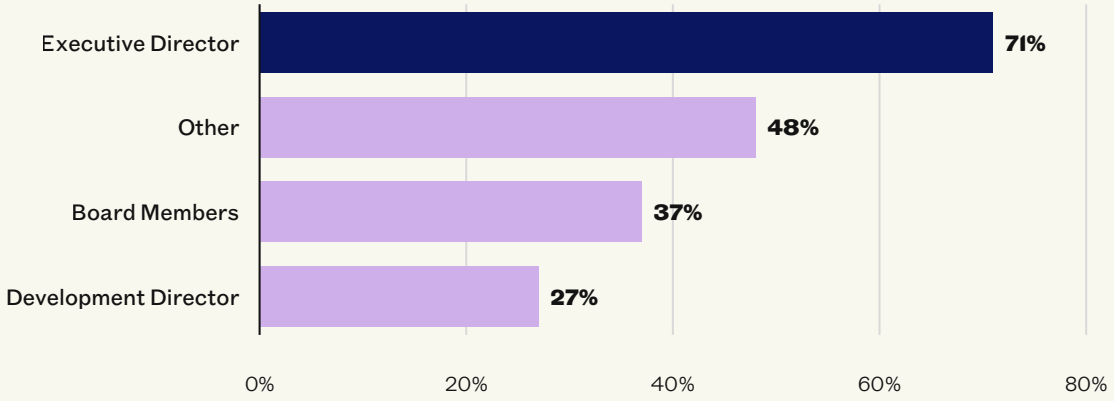
86 organizations took part in the Brooklyn Org Nonprofit Communications Survey this summer. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) are well-established organizations 10+ years old. Just over a third are micro-organizations with annual budgets under $100K, and the sample skews smaller overall, with 64% operating on budgets under $1M. Four issue areas are represented by at least 40% of respondents (who could select more than one): youth (55%), health and well-being (45%), families (42%), and arts and culture (41%).

The 11217 ZIP code (Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Park Slope, and Prospect Heights) has the highest concentration of respondent headquarters in Brooklyn (15%). Notably, 21% of respondents listed a headquarters outside Brooklyn, mostly in Manhattan, likely reflecting administrative offices, fiscal sponsors, or mailing addresses for organizations that serve Brooklyn communities.

See Appendix A for the full sample composition.

When There's No Dedicated Staff, the ED Fills the Gap

Staff/board roles contributing to communications, among 62 orgs without full-time comms staff (72% of all respondents)



Among organizations without full-time communications staff, time spent is limited: 79% of those who answered spend under 10 combined staff/board/volunteer hours per week, and only 6 organizations reported more than 20 hours/week. 28% of organizations use an external consultant to support communications in some way.

Spending is thin: 44% of organizations dedicate less than 5% of their annual budget to communications, 14% don't know what share they spend, and just two respondents spend more than 30%.

53% of organizations use AI tools for communications, a notably high adoption rate, but opinions on its impact are split: of the 45 AI-using organizations that answered, just 17 have seen a positive change in public engagement since adopting AI, 8 have not, and 20 don't know.

OUR STORY

Brooklyn Org

10-25 years old, more than $10M annual budget, civic engagement-focused

In 2023, after 14 years as Brooklyn Community Foundation, the organization was ready for a refresh. It faced the dual challenge of seizing the opportunity of Brooklyn's surging prosperity and cultural cachet while meeting persistent need in underserved communities. A new strategic plan set twin goals: building the capacity and power of nonprofits serving the borough, and activating and mobilizing more resources to expand community impact.

To support this plan, a new brand by Brooklyn-based global design firm Mother New York announced the foundation's transformation into BKO in fall 2023. The branding aims to be approachable and inclusive, countering perceptions of philanthropy as elitist and inaccessible. The shift has been supported by a first-of-its-kind borough-wide PSA campaign, community listening events, digital marketing, and a Webby-winning website that serves as a hub for Brooklynites to learn about local issues and the nonprofits addressing them.

BKO's focus on storytelling and amplifying local voices reinforces its message of community philanthropy, by Brooklyn and for Brooklyn. The work is led by dedicated communications staff supported by external consultants, similar to most surveyed nonprofits with budgets above $10M, but BKO stands out for updating its website and social media daily. The strategy has increased brand awareness and engagement, with a 57% increase in major event attendance, a 188% boost in website visitors, and a 282% jump in grant applications received.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR BEST-PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Tell human-centered stories.
- Be predictable in your communications cadence.
- Track your efforts and ask for feedback.
- Engage local media and emerging influencers.

OVERALL SURVEY FINDINGS

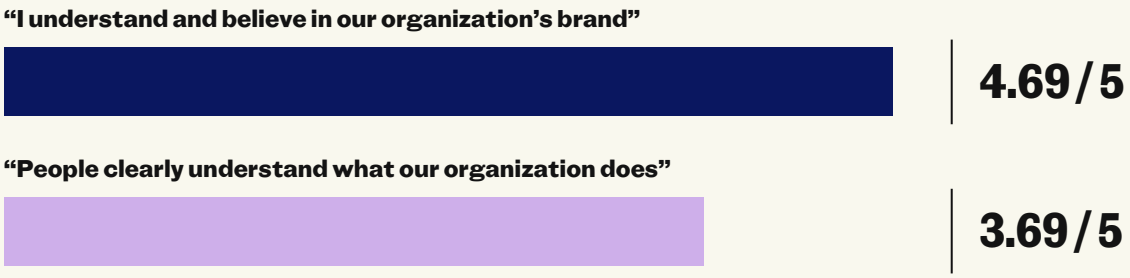
Brand Clarity

Respondents rated their communications effectiveness across a range of functions on a one-to-five scale, with five the highest (see Appendix B for the full table).

Organizations are highly confident in their own understanding of their brand (mean 4.69 out of 5), but much less sure that outside audiences understand them (mean 3.69 out of 5). This roughly one-point gap between internal conviction and perceived external clarity is the most consistent pattern in the effectiveness data, recurring across nearly every subgroup. Staff (mean 4.15 out of 5) are also seen as better able than board members (mean 3.90 out of 5) to clearly communicate about the organization.

The Internal / External Brand-Clarity Gap

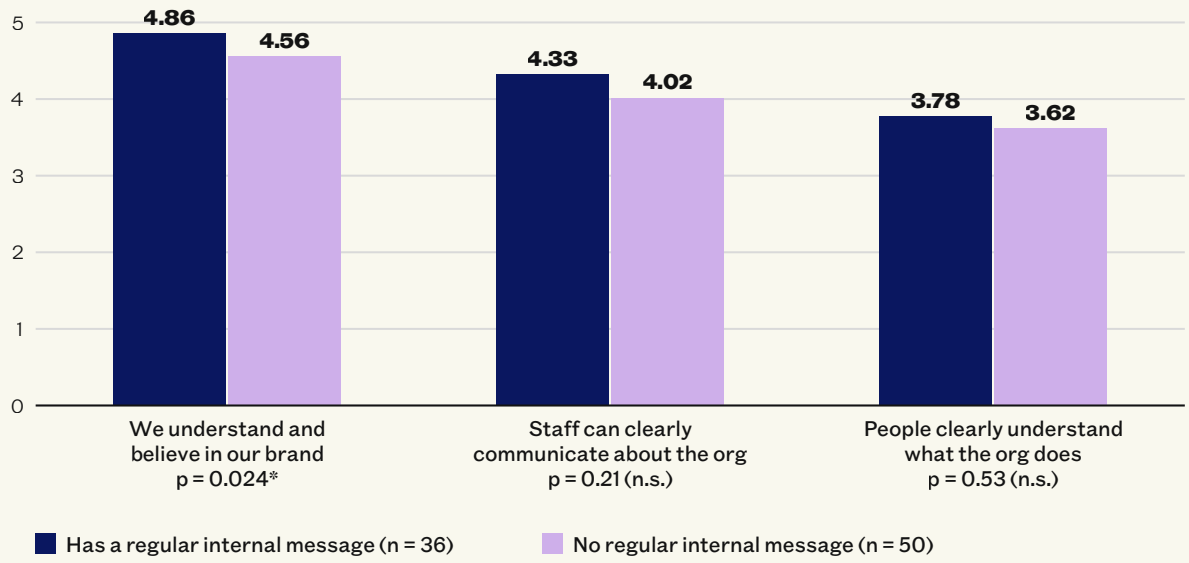
The single most consistent pattern in the data, recurring across nearly every subgroup



Regular internal communication keeps staff aligned with the brand, which can strengthen their ability to communicate it to clients and stakeholders and to relay feedback to leadership on what is and isn't resonating. The survey bears this out: the 42% of organizations with a regular (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) internal message give stronger brand-connection ratings for their leadership, staff, and the public than the 58% without one. The effect appears strongest for leadership's own understanding of and belief in the brand.

Internal Messaging Goes With Stronger Brand Connection

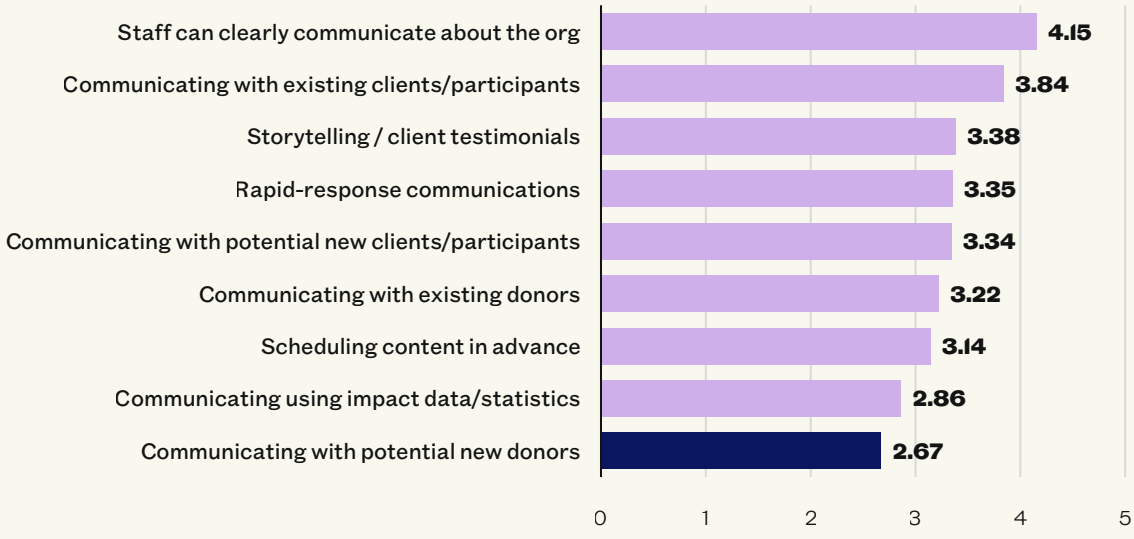
Mean self-rating (1–5) by whether the organization has a regular internal communications message • n = 86



Organizations rated themselves weakest at reaching new donors (mean 2.67 out of 5, the lowest score in the survey) and communicating with impact data/statistics (mean 2.86 out of 5). The two may be linked, since prospective donors who care about their contributions' positive influence likely value evidence of measurable impact most. By contrast, organizations feel confident engaging the audiences they already have, such as existing clients (mean 3.84 out of 5).

Self-Rated Effectiveness by Communications Function

Mean rating, 1 (not at all effective) to 5 (very effective) • n = 86 responses



CASE STUDY

University Settlement

More than 25 years old, more than $10M annual budget, arts and culture / civic engagement / families / health and well-being / housing / immigrants / older adults / youth-focused

University Settlement is one of the largest and oldest organizations in the survey: 140 years old, with an annual budget above $10M and more than 30 programs spanning youth, older adults, housing, immigrants, health, and the arts. It spends less than 5% of its budget on communications, staffed by a two-person team within a broader external relations department that also covers individual and institutional giving. It rates its storytelling a perfect 5 out of 5, but communicating with potential new clients and using impact data each a 2 out of 5, reflecting a mastery of narrative alongside an active push to broaden its reach and quantify its impact. Peers of similar budget size rate themselves higher on reaching new clients and using impact data (means 3.6 and 2.8 out of 5) but lower on storytelling (mean 4.2 out of 5).

University Settlement engages consultants selectively, for projects like gala branding and web development, rather than retaining an agency of record. It treats storytelling quality, not metrics, as its primary measure of success, with event revenue the exception: a recent gala raised a record $1.3M on the strength of its branding and video. The CEO serves as lead storyteller through LinkedIn and a 6,000-subscriber email list, whose 36+ emails a year sustain a 30-40% open rate. The organization handles public relations internally but prioritizes its own channels over chasing media hits. It has a formal AI policy and uses tools such as Microsoft Copilot and Canva.

With dozens of largely self-managed programs, the communications team acts as an internal consultant rather than a central gatekeeper, setting brand guidelines and providing Canva for Nonprofits training instead of approving every post. Formalizing that model by giving each program a designated marketing lead is a top priority for improving communication with potential clients and beneficiaries.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR BEST-PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Define your goal(s) and audience(s), and target your messaging accordingly.
- Be careful not to overextend.
- Tell human-centered stories.
- Develop an internal AI policy for communications.
- Don’t assume that more infrastructure means more agility.

OVERALL SURVEY FINDINGS

Communications Goals, Methods, and Metrics

Social media (94%), email (88%), and websites (87%) are the top channels for reaching clients/participants, and social media is rated the most effective for that audience (32 respondents), narrowly ahead of email (26). For donors, email dominates in both use (90%) and perceived effectiveness (55% call it their most effective donor channel), far ahead of social media (53% use it, but only 12% say it's most effective).

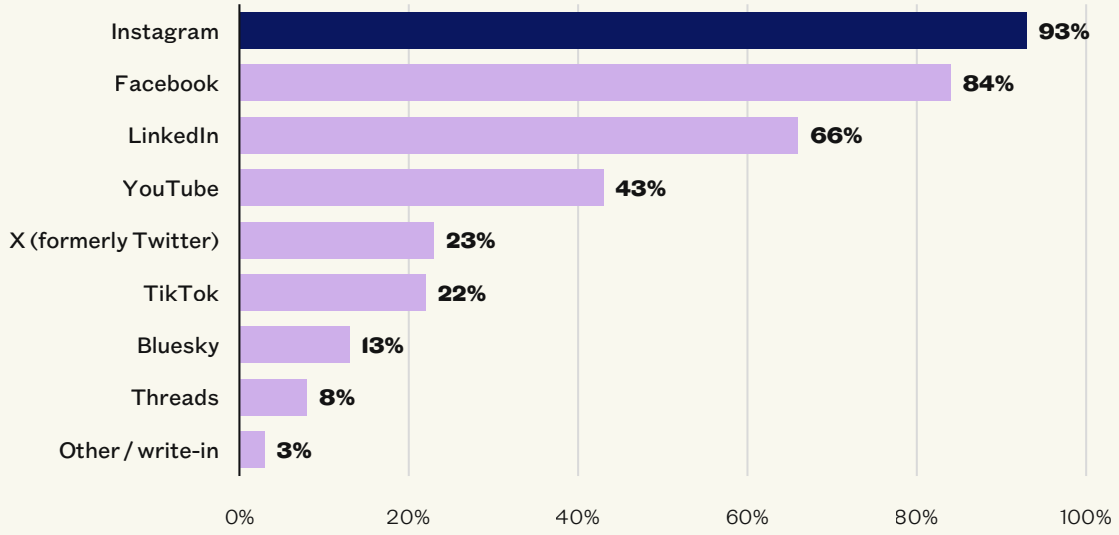
Community engagement (74 organizations) and fundraising (68) are the top current communications goals, followed by brand awareness (42), program recruitment (39), and advocacy (29). Looking ahead, fundraising and community engagement tie as the top future goal (63 each).

Website (95%) and social media (97%) presence are nearly universal, but updates are infrequent. 73% of organizations update their websites monthly or less, and only two update daily. Social media is refreshed somewhat more often: 58% update weekly and 14% post daily, while 28% post monthly or less. Organizations see both channels as strong for sharing updates and building community, but consistently name fundraising effectiveness as the top desired improvement for each (69 votes for website, 71 for social media).

Among the 97% of organizations with a social media presence, Instagram (80 organizations) and Facebook (72) lead, followed by LinkedIn (57) and YouTube (37), while X/Twitter (20), TikTok (19), Bluesky (11), and Threads (7) see limited adoption. This mirrors national adult adoption trends reported by the Pew Research Center, where YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are the most widely used platforms and Instagram is popular in urban communities like New York City and among the younger generations many Brooklyn nonprofits aim to reach. LinkedIn is particularly effective for messaging aimed at C-suite peers and high-value donors.

Instagram, Facebook Lead; Reach Fragments After

Social media platforms used, among 86 organizations • multi-select, so totals exceed 100%



Just 42% of nonprofits have a regular (daily/weekly/monthly) internal communications message to staff, and only 51% track any communications metrics. Those that do most often track social media engagement, email subscriber growth, and email open rates, followed by website traffic and media hits. Evaluation is typically sporadic, with quarterly review most common, followed by monthly. Together with the update frequencies above, this paints a picture of Brooklyn nonprofits that are familiar with digital tools but use them infrequently or inconsistently.

73%
of websites are updated monthly or less often

42%
have a regular internal communications cadence

51%
track any communications metrics at all

CASE STUDY

Bed-Stuy Gateway BID

10-25 years old, $500K-$1M annual budget, arts and culture / jobs and economic opportunity-focused

Since 2019, Bed-Stuy Gateway BID has served as the Business Improvement District for the Fulton Street and Nostrand Avenue commercial area, with a mandate spanning commercial corridor revitalization, community development, arts and culture promotion, and economic empowerment. It dedicates 10-20% of its $500K-$1M annual budget to communications, more than double the under-five-percent share reported by roughly 44% of Brooklyn nonprofits. Like most of the sector, it has no dedicated full-time communications staff, relying on its executive director with occasional part-time help from an external consultant. It tracks communications metrics weekly, more often than any other surveyed organization of similar budget size. The BID rates itself similarly to its budget-size peers on internal brand belief and staff ability to communicate the brand (5 and 5 vs. 4.6 and 4.8 averaged), but well above them on communicating with existing donors (4 vs. 2.9 averaged), potential new donors (3 vs. 2.4 averaged), and storytelling and client testimonials (4 vs. 3.4 averaged).

Its weekly electronic newsletters, timed based on readership data, are tracked in Mailchimp for open rates and subscriber growth. The BID also posts on social media and Patch and places paid advertorials in Our Time Press, a Black-owned and operated hyperlocal weekly, to reach the immediate community within the district. That publication recently went all-digital, reflecting the changing media environment and posing a possible challenge for older residents and those affected by the digital divide. Bed-Stuy Gateway BID credits consistency, not novelty, for engagement: recurring events like “Sustainable Saturday” reliably fill to capacity. The executive director personally proofreads every communication, preferring an “old-school” approach even as part-time support experiments with AI-assisted drafts, and the BID also shares content and resources from community partners.

The BID’s constraints come down to capacity. Three Facebook pages inherited from a predecessor still await consolidation, adding maintenance effort, and promotional materials often go out just two or three days before an event rather than the preferred two weeks.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR BEST-PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop an internal AI policy for communications.
- Be predictable in your communications cadence.
- Track your efforts and ask for feedback.
- Engage local media and emerging influencers.
- Consider short-term capacity investments in long-term communications development.
- Partner with like-minded nonprofits.

Survey Analysis by Subgroups

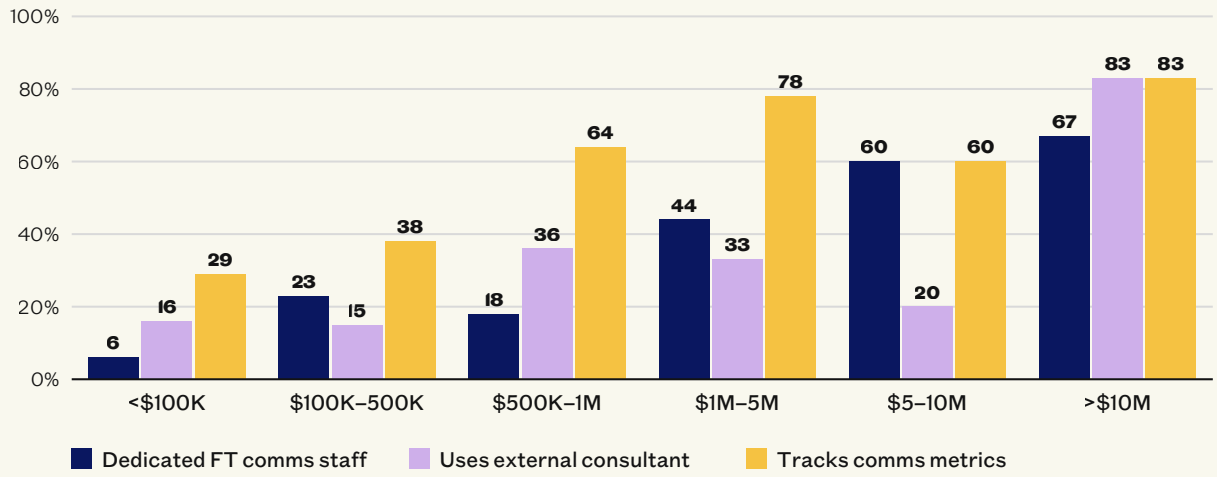
BUDGET

Budget size shows the clearest, most consistent relationship with communications capacity of any subgroup. Larger organizations are more likely to have dedicated staff, outside support, and formal measurement, though greater capacity doesn't always mean higher self-rated effectiveness.

Budget Predicts Capacity

Source: Appendix C.

STAFFING, CONSULTANTS, AND MEASUREMENT (% OF ORGS)



SELF-RATED DONOR AND CLIENT EFFECTIVENESS (MEAN, 1–5)



Dedicated communications staffing rises steeply with budget, from six percent of organizations under $100K to 67% of those above $10M, an eleven-fold difference. External consultant use follows a similar pattern, reaching 83% among the largest organizations. Metrics tracking roughly doubles between the smallest organizations (29%) and the three tiers above $1M (60-83%), suggesting formal measurement depends on having the staff capacity for it.

Self-rated effectiveness in reaching new donors improves modestly with budget (from 2.65 among the smallest organizations to 3.17 among the largest), but even well-resourced organizations rate it only around the scale's midpoint; donor acquisition remains a challenge at every size.

Budget share does not scale cleanly with size: micro-organizations are somewhat more likely than mid-sized nonprofits to spend more than ten percent of their budget on communications, perhaps because a single staff person or contractor is a larger share of a small budget.

Not every metric improves with size. Rapid-response effectiveness is highest among $5M–10M organizations (mean 4.40 out of 5) and lowest among those over $10M (mean 2.50 out of 5, n=6). The sample is small, but the pattern suggests the largest nonprofits may face more internal approval layers that slow rapid response.

See Appendix C for selected findings by budget size.

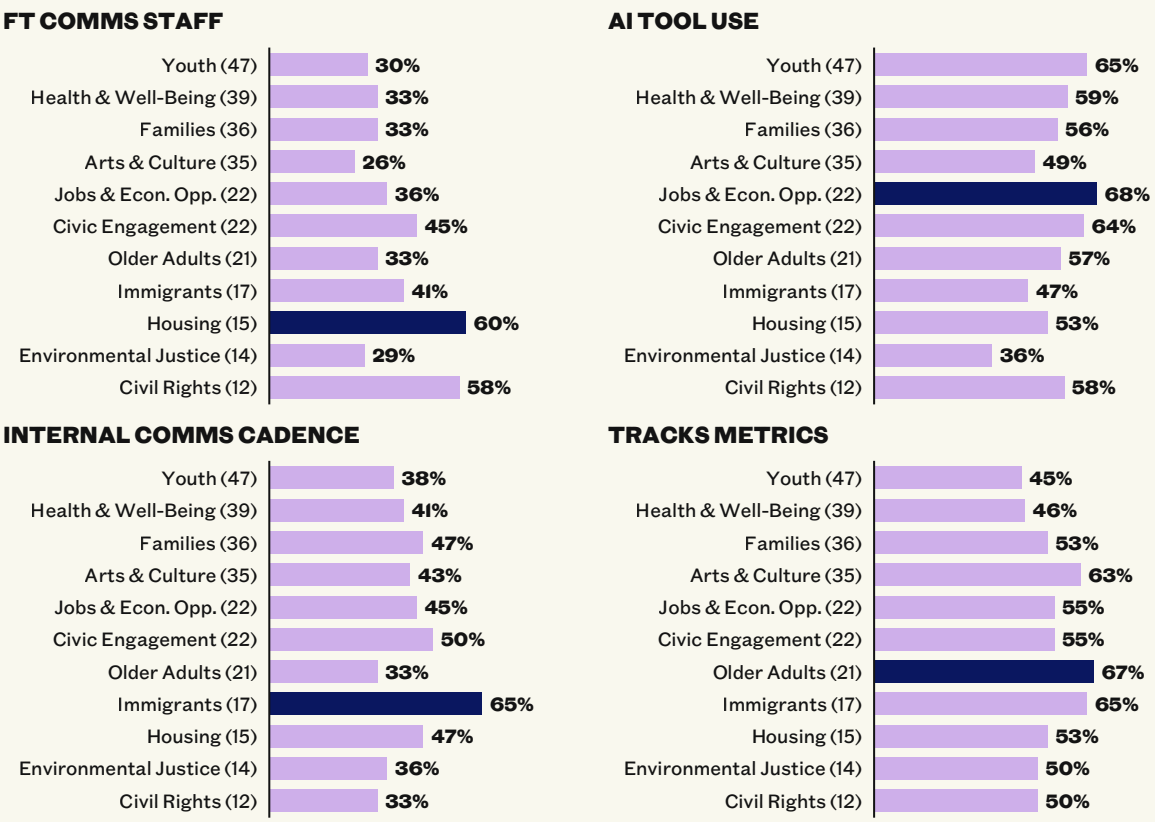
ISSUE AREA FOCUS

Civil rights- (58%) and housing-focused (60%) organizations report the highest rates of dedicated full-time communications staff, while arts and culture (26%) and environmental justice (29%) organizations report the lowest.

Immigrant-serving organizations stand out for operational discipline: they report the highest rate of regular internal communications (65%, well above the ~33–50% typical of other issue areas) and one of the highest rates of metrics tracking (65%, just behind older adults-focused nonprofits at 67%).

Discipline Varies Sharply by Issue Area

% of organizations in each issue area, largest to smallest • multi-select, so organizations may appear in more than one group • highest value in each panel highlighted • Source: Appendix D.



Jobs and economic opportunity organizations report the highest AI tool adoption (68%), while immigrant-serving (47%) and environmental justice (36%) organizations report the lowest, possibly reflecting more trust-sensitive, relationship-based, or multilingual communications needs.

Reaching new donors is the weakest self-rated function in every issue area (roughly 2.6-3.1 out of 5), with none having solved it, reinforcing that donor acquisition is a borough-wide, sector-wide issue.

See Appendix D for selected findings by issue area.

CASE STUDY

New Sanctuary Coalition

10-25 years old, $100K-$500K annual budget, immigrants-focused

New Sanctuary Coalition is an immigrant rights advocacy micro-organization working at the city, state, and federal levels, founded by leaders with their own experience of detention and deportation. Like the vast majority of surveyed nonprofits with similar budgets ($100K-$500K annually), it has no dedicated communications staff or external consultant, and it spends fewer than five collective hours a week on communications. Even so, it rates itself strongly on rapid response (4 out of 5) and public understanding of its brand and mission (5 out of 5), compared with peer means (excluding New Sanctuary Coalition itself) of 2.7 and 3.6 out of 5, and it has earned positive media attention for a mission at the center of the last decade's hot-button political debate.

Its "think globally, work locally" model is built around volunteer-run, encrypted coordination — Signal and WhatsApp groups seeded through one-on-one, "old school" relationship-building — that lets the organization move people through legal crises quickly and securely. Operational security directly shapes its tool choices, from preferring WebEx over Zoom on privacy grounds to deliberately not collecting or storing bulk personal data on the community members it serves.

That same security-first posture explains its donor engagement gap. The organization is candid that fundraising has taken a back seat to crisis response, an area it has under-invested in while prioritizing resource-building. Rather than traditional media outreach, it aims to be a trusted source for journalists during active crises, shaping how a story is told, not just whether it runs. Its storytelling is relationship-based rather than data-driven, aimed less at publicity than at shifting how local communities understand and support undocumented neighbors. Its communications model is built for trust and speed; fundraising infrastructure is the clear next frontier, and would enable more timely follow-through on other community outreach initiatives.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR BEST-PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Define your goal(s) and audience(s), and target your messaging accordingly.
- Be careful not to overextend.
- Tell human-centered stories.

ORGANIZATION AGE

Dedicated full-time communications staffing does not rise steadily with age. It is less common among 1-5 year-old (7%) and 10-25 year-old organizations (17%), and more common among 5-10 year-old (31%) and 25+ year-old organizations (50%). The most established organizations are the most likely to have dedicated staff and to use outside consultants (42%). Internal communications cadence is sharply higher among 5-10 year-old organizations (75% have a regular internal message) than any other age group (29-41%).

The 5-10 Year Cohort Rates Itself Highest

Mean rating (1–5 scale) on seven brand clarity and effectiveness items, by organization age in years • 1–5 yrs n=15, 5–10 yrs n=16, 10–25 yrs n=29, 25+ yrs n=24 • 5–10 year cohort highlighted • Source: Appendix E. Excludes organizations under 1 year old.



AI adoption is higher among newer organizations (69% of 5-10 year-olds, for example) than older ones (50% of those over 25 years), possibly because newer organizations built their communications around newer tools from the start. Conversely, metrics tracking is more common among older organizations (59% of 10-25 year-olds and 58% of those over 25) than newer ones (27% of 1-5 year-olds).

See Appendix E for selected findings by organization age.

Appendix A: Survey Sample Composition

By Organization Age

Age	N	% of Respondents
Less than 1 year old	2	2%
1–5 years old	15	17%
5–10 years old	16	19%
10–25 years old	29	34%
More than 25 years old	24	28%

By Annual Budget

Budget	N	% of Respondents
Less than $100K	31	36%
$100K–$500K	13	15%
$500K–$1M	11	13%
$1M–$5M	18	21%
$5M–$10M	5	6%
More than $10M	6	7%
I don't know	2	2%

By Headquarters ZIP Code

ZIP / Area	N	% of Respondents
11217 – Boerum Hill / Fort Greene / Park Slope / Prospect Heights	13	15%
11201 – Brooklyn Heights / Cobble Hill / Downtown Brooklyn / DUMBO	8	9%
11238 – Clinton Hill / Crown Heights / Prospect Heights	4	5%
11206 – Bedford-Stuyvesant / Bushwick / Williamsburg	4	5%
Other Brooklyn ZIPs (19 distinct ZIPs, 1–4 respondents each)	38	44%
Outside Brooklyn (Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island, and one outlier)	18	21%

By Issue-Area Focus (Organizations Can Multi-Select)

Issue Area	N	% of Respondents
Youth	47	55%
Health and Well-Being	39	45%
Families	36	42%
Arts and Culture	35	41%
Older Adults	21	24%
Jobs and Economic Opportunity	22	26%
Civic Engagement	22	26%
Immigrants	17	20%
Housing	15	17%
Environmental Justice	14	16%
Civil Rights	12	14%
All other write-in areas (Justice Reform, Education, Food Access, etc.)	≤10 each	≤12%

Appendix B: Self-Rated Effectiveness by Communications Function

Function	Mean (1–5 Scale)
Communicating with existing clients/participants	3.84
Staff can clearly communicate about the org	4.15
Storytelling / client testimonials	3.38
Communicating with potential new clients/ participants	3.34
Rapid-response communications	3.35
Communicating with existing donors	3.22
Scheduling content in advance	3.14
Communicating using impact data/statistics	2.86
Communicating with potential new donors	2.67

Appendix C: Selected Findings by Budget Size

Metric	<$100K (N=31)	$100K–500K (N=13)	$500K–1M (N=11)	$1M–5M (N=18)	$5–10M (N=5)	>$10M (N=6)
Dedicated FTE comms staff	6%	23%	18%	44%	60%	67%
Uses external consultant	16%	15%	36%	33%	20%	83%
Tracks comms metrics	29%	38%	64%	78%	60%	83%
Effective w/ new donors (1-5 scale)	2.65	2.38	2.45	2.94	2.60	3.17
Effective w/ existing clients (1-5 scale)	3.55	3.85	4.00	4.33	3.80	3.67

Appendix D: Selected Findings by Issue Area Focus

Issue Area (n)	FT Comms Staff	AI Tool Use	Internal Comms Cadence	Tracks Metrics
Youth (47)	30%	65%	38%	45%
Health and Well-Being (39)	33%	59%	41%	46%
Families (36)	33%	56%	47%	53%
Arts and Culture (35)	26%	49%	43%	63%
Older Adults (21)	33%	57%	33%	67%
Jobs and Economic Opportunity (22)	36%	68%	45%	55%
Civic Engagement (22)	45%	64%	50%	55%
Immigrants (17)	41%	47%	65%	65%
Housing (15)	60%	53%	47%	53%
Environmental Justice (14)	29%	36%	36%	50%
Civil Rights (12)	58%	58%	33%	50%

Appendix E: Selected Findings by Organization Age

Metric (Mean, 1–5)	1–5 Yrs (n=15)	5–10 Yrs (n=16)	10–25 Yrs (n=29)	25+ Yrs (n=24)
Brand clearly communicates our work	4.07	4.31	4.17	3.71
People understand what we do	3.40	3.88	3.72	3.58
Effective with existing clients	3.27	4.19	3.83	3.88
Effective with new clients	2.87	3.75	3.31	3.29
Effective using impact data	2.40	3.50	2.76	2.75
Effective storytelling	3.00	3.88	3.31	3.29
Effective rapid response	3.00	3.50	3.34	3.33

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