



# 2021 Donor Strategy Guide

3 Strategies Resilient Ministries Use  
to Bounce Back from 2020

**BY DONORDIRECT, THE LEADER IN SOFTWARE BUILT  
EXCLUSIVELY FOR MINISTRIES MAKING A STRONG IMPACT.**



**2020 was a tough year. For nonprofits and ministries, it may have been the toughest in recent memory. Many smaller ministries found they lacked the infrastructure to weather the storm. Some hung on by their fingernails, hoping that COVID-19 would soon be eradicated so they could get back on their feet and resume operations.**

A survey conducted in partnership with Washington Council Ernst & Young, revealed 83% of [nonprofit] organizations experienced a reduction in revenue and 53% of organizations had a reduction in individual giving.” This “hit both the organizations’ ability to fulfill their missions and their ability to maintain employees.” Seventy-one percent experienced a “reduction in operations,” including a 47% decline in employment. Those are alarming statistics—and perhaps you’ve experienced similar challenges.

In 2021, many are hopeful a vaccine will change things, but possibly not until the middle of the year...and even then, people may be reluctant to engage in social activities and “normal life.” This trend may continue for some time.

If you’re wondering how you can bounce back from the impact of the global pandemic, you’re not alone. Donor Direct has collaborated with more than 80 nonprofits, including Turning Point, Joyce Meyer Ministries, Focus on the Family, and Food For The Poor, Inc. Each ministry has leveraged software to build effective strategies. Here’s what we’ve discovered gives today’s ministries the resilience they need—especially in these trying times.

**About DonorDirect: For more than 20 years, DonorDirect has helped ministries take advantage of emerging technology. We offer the only enterprise-wide Donor Management and CRM system developed exclusively for ministries. DonorDirect currently serves over 80 non-profits including Turning Point, Joyce Meyer Ministries, Focus on the Family, and Food For The Poor, Inc.**

# Strategy #1: Empower Your Team



Whether you're feeding the hungry in Africa, creating kindness programs for children in your city, sending staff to the hardest hit areas of the world, or sharing the Good News via media platforms, ministry is always a team effort. Even though sometimes it may appear as though a ministry is led by a front-facing personality, those who have been a part of this for a while know that it takes a unified force to make a lasting difference. For day-to-day operations, that means departments coming together, each bringing their skillset to the table: accounting, customer service, marketing, editorial, information technology and more.

At DonorDirect, we've had unique insight into ministry operations of all scales and have especially noticed that while many nonprofits understand the value of departmental communication, few extend that principle to their software solutions.

When facing unexpected global circumstances like COVID-19, you want your software to reflect the strengths of a unified organization. Your Donor Management or CRM (Constituent Relationship Management) software should centralize your data. Just as multiple departments meet together to keep everyone on the same page, your data should be "together" in one place. Often organizations find themselves using multiple software packages with loose connections, if any at all, when it comes to sharing data. You want your software to save every department in your ministry time and money by allowing you to:

- Look up donors
- Edit donor information
- Handle receipting
- Track conversations
- Plan outbound activity, and
- Handle batching

...all in one place. If you find you're unable to log into one location to accomplish everything listed above, it's time to upgrade your CRM. Because when tragedy hits and departmental activity is split up across the miles, the last thing you want is for your data to be "locked" within a patched-together system.

This is especially true for smaller ministry teams. When departments each consist of just a few people, you want to ensure your donor's data is easily available to the complete organization, even if an entire department is not. This means finding a Donor Management solution that equips small staff to do more—with less.

**TIP: A growing concern in today's world is the security of data, so confirm that your chosen CRM is fully "PCI compliant." PCI compliance means that all data is secure, encrypted, and redundant. The best CRM systems should be PCI compliant out of the box, relieving your ministry of this IT burden and providing peace of mind.**



## Strategy #2: Cultivate Your Most Engaged Donors

Your donors are the lifeblood of your ministry. They're the ones who commit to standing behind your vision, and who bring the highly effective "grass roots marketing" to everything you do.

While nonprofits are always looking to increase their percentage of new donors each month, an even more effective strategy is to make sure those who have raised their hand to be a part of what you do don't fall away. Ministries have found this especially important during times of uncertainty like 2020 when COVID-19 hit and everything changed. It wasn't acquiring new donors that pulled them through; it was being able to count on those with whom they'd already forged a healthy, reciprocal relationship.

During trying times, partners are looking for answers and turn to the ministries they trust most. By continuing to add value to your relationship, your donors will become even more committed to your cause—knowing that even when things got rough, they weren't forgotten. Quite the contrary, nonprofits that engage their active donors provide a much-needed service.

How do you engage donors when you need to bounce back? Once more, the right software solution can provide the tools you need so you never miss a beat. These tools include:

- Automation
- Scheduled Activities
- Instant Notifications, and
- Advanced Reporting

Without software, there is a lot of manual effort. For example, when a donor writes in and requests a specific product and prayer, the appropriate departments are manually notified so that there is a timely response. These notifications can get lost, not tracked, and never fulfilled. With a modern CRM, this workflow can be completely automated, which can transform a smaller ministry. By allowing regular communication and triggers to happen automatically, the right interactions can occur at the right time, freeing up more time for ministry.

You can also schedule regular activities. Email series can be deployed at specific intervals, scheduled ahead of time, and initiated based upon donor activity. The time and resources it would take to do this manually are staggering; the ease at which this can happen with a good Donor Management solution is remarkable.

Instant notifications from your CRM will keep you on the pulse of what's happening across your donor base. You can see who's responding to which communication and if their donations have been affected by real-life circumstances. Couple this with advanced reporting and you can be proactive when engaging your donors, as well as reactive to ministry trends.





## Strategy #3: Implement Technology that Supports Ministry Growth

When you're trying to bounce back, it may seem antithetical to expect ministry growth. But as tough times require even more from nonprofits, ministries can push forward with their hopeful message and expect it to resonate farther than ever.

In our experience with a world-class CRM, three key factors affect the growth of ministries both during tragedy and during their time of bouncing back:

1. A modern platform
2. A flexible solution
3. The right partnership

As times have changed, so has software. “Old school” software was accessible only on stand-alone computers, housed deep within the IT structure of an organization. Security was the responsibility of an internal IT department, as were daily updates and deployment. Today, these concerns can be outsourced to your CRM provider. A modern CRM platform is available within any computer browser. Rather than launching a computer program, all users need to do is point and click into the CRM.

A modern CRM, therefore, should be accessible anytime, anywhere and on any platform. Be sure you can access your donor records via a desktop computer or laptop—PC or Mac—as well as on any tablet or smartphone. In the office? At home? On the mission field? The data you need should be only a click away. And because you're growing—even during bounce-back times—your CRM solution should be able to grow with you. No matter how big you get or how wide your impact spreads, you should never have to go through the pain of a systemwide transition again. Double-check to ensure your CRM is flexible, with a viable upgrade path, preferably to a solution that simply “steps up” from the previous solution. Only minor new training on new modules should be necessary as everything else should be a natural move up.

For example, advanced CRMs like DonorDirect's StudioEssentials have a built-in upgrade path so you can simply transition to DonorDirect StudioEnterprise without the discomfort of having to learn an entirely new system. The two systems were created in tandem for ministries who may need a viable upgrade path. Your CRM, whatever you choose, should have the ability to scale, too, so be sure to ask about future upgrade options when shopping around.

**TIP: Watch out for platforms that “nickel and dime” you. Your Donor Management solution should allow for unlimited accounts, unlimited records, unlimited transactions, and priority support. If the software you're looking at tiers these items, it's a strong indicator that you could constantly be facing unexpected charges.**

Finally, aside from the technology, be sure to give considerable weight to the company behind the CRM solution you choose. Some Donor Management solutions are modified extensions to business and sales platforms. Others are created from the ground up just for the nonprofit sector. The latter are more desirable because they're built with ministry in mind. Everything—from accounting practices to donor communication to reporting—is custom-designed for the nonprofit sector, which can make a big difference when it comes to ease of operation and workflow. Furthermore, when possible, search for companies that are not only familiar with your religious non-profit mission, but also believe in it. Your software is a long-term solution, and you want to be assured that the company you're partnering with shares your values and is creating the software in a way that supports your vision and mission.

**TIP:** When shopping for a Donor Management solution, always ask for references from similar nonprofits and ministries that use the software you're considering. Names in your sector should be recognizable and provide you with the confidence you need in your investment.

## What Donor Direct Customers are Saying

“DonorDirect’s mission isn’t to create one-size-fits-all solutions for non-profits. We’re here for ministries.

“We built our software from the ground up, alongside fellow ministries, to ensure you have everything you need as we partner with you in accomplishing your mission.

“And when you install StudioEssentials, you’re never in it alone. We provide tailored, white-gloved onboarding designed to empower you to use StudioEssentials right away. That way you can keep focusing on what matters most: your ministry.”





# Software Purchase Checklist


As you shop for the perfect CRM for your nonprofit or ministry, feel free to call the DonorDirect team at any time to field questions, ask for advice, and even receive a free, online, personalized demonstration. Experience for yourself how a Donor Management solution can help you gain the footing you need to bounce back during these uncertain times.

## **Checklist of the Most Important Software Features Needed for Bouncing Back in 2021:**

- ✓ **Centralization of your data**
- ✓ **PCI compliance**
- ✓ **Full automation features**
- ✓ **Scheduling of activities**
- ✓ **Instant notifications**
- ✓ **Advanced reporting functions**
- ✓ **Browser-based platform**
- ✓ **Flexibility to upgrade when growth happens**
- ✓ **A team that shares your values and supports your mission**

One of our popular solutions, StudioEssentials, is robust, yet affordable Donor Management software especially created for small- to mid-sized ministries. It contains the most popular features of its flagship product, StudioEnterprise, but on a scale better suited to growing ministries. Contact us anytime to see how it works.

The year 2020 was tough, and 2021 may still feel uncertain. But with a strong software solution, you can empower your team, cultivate your engaged donors, and continue growing your ministry. You can bounce back stronger than ever!



**We invite you to try  
DonorDirect StudioEssentials  
All the Essentials a Growing Ministry Needs**

**Visit [donordirect.com/studioessentials](https://donordirect.com/studioessentials) or call 972-744-9500  
to get a firsthand look at DonorDirect StudioEssentials today!**