

Best Practices: Visual Elements in Social Media Fundraising Appeals

Use these best practices to craft compelling and emotionally resonant visual content for your social media fundraising appeals. Effective visuals are key to stopping the scroll, inspiring connection, and encouraging action.

Lead with Faces, Not Logos

Use authentic, high-quality photos of people connected to your mission. Faces build empathy and drive engagement more than logos or graphics.

Show, Don't Tell

Depict transformation and impact visually. Use joyful, hopeful images that show the difference your work makes, not just the problem.

Stay Consistent with Brand Feel

Use a consistent color palette, font, and tone. Authenticity matters more than polish — overly slick design can feel cold.

Design for Thumb-Stopping

Use square or vertical images optimized for mobile. Add short text overlays (2–4 words) that convey emotion or action, like 'Help Her Finish School'.

Be Inclusive and Representative

Choose visuals that reflect your community with dignity. Avoid

stereotypes and show diversity, agency, and respect.

Capture a Moment, Not a Stock Photo

Use real, in-the-moment photos. If using stock, choose candid and emotionally rich images — not overly staged or generic ones.

Align Visuals with the Ask

Match the image tone with the type of appeal. For monthly gifts, show sustained impact; for emergency appeals, convey immediacy without exploitation.

Test and Learn

Try A/B testing different visuals. Track engagement metrics and learn what resonates most with your audience.

Use Varied Storytellers

User-Generated Content: Encourage and repost photos or videos shared by your supporters to build community and social proof.

Everything is a Story

Use this checklist to evaluate and strengthen the story embedded in any communication — whether it's an event, an email, a donor pitch, or a staff meeting. Not every item will apply every time, but the more you consider, the more intentional and powerful your storytelling will be.

Core Elements

- Who is the hero in this story? (Who are we centering?)
- What challenge, opportunity, or 'villain' are they facing?
- What is the arc? (Beginning, middle, end — what changes?)
- What's the deeper purpose or takeaway?

Clarity & Simplicity

- Is the story easy to follow, even for someone outside the organization?
- Have I removed jargon and unnecessary details?
- Have I focused on what matters most to the audience?

Emotional Impact

- What emotion(s) do I want the audience to feel?
- Does the story create a moment of connection, surprise, or reflection?
- Am I inviting empathy, inspiration, or action?

Call to Action

- Is there a clear 'so what' or next step?

- Does the story move people to do something — give, volunteer, learn more, reflect, share?

Audience & Inclusion

- Is this story respectful and authentic to the community represented?
- Have I considered multilingual audiences or cultural context?
- Am I reinforcing or challenging stereotypes — and how do I know?

Experience Design (for Events)

- What nonverbal elements help tell this story? (space, visuals, music, table setup, etc.)
- What role can board members or staff play in advancing the story during the event?
- What will attendees feel, know, and be able to do afterward?