

MARKETING GUIDE

Taglines That Tell Create a Memorable Message for Your Nonprofit

INTRODUCTION

A pitch-perfect tagline can be the foundation for the suite of messages you use to communicate the value of your organization or program.

A tagline is a punchy, memorable phrase that enhances your name by clarifying your work and making it relevant to your audience. The right tagline is a powerful way to communicate your organization's brand and all that it represents.

Requirements for Great Taglines

Be Memorable

A tagline that's easy to remember will help people connect with your brand and your mission. Make it bold and brief so it carries emotional weight.

Engage the Reader

Make it clear that the reader is part of the equation. Avoid appearing as if you've already solved the problem your organization addresses; instead, emphasize how much the reader means to your ability to solve it.

Communicate a Key Benefit

Don't write a tagline that's all about you. Yes, it should help the reader understand your mission, but make sure it conveys a benefit to your reader—something they'll see as meaningful.

Have Personality

Your organization has a personality. If it's an engaging one, people will want to associate with you. Is your organization serious or relaxed? Avant-garde or conventional? Make sure your tagline reflects the best of your organization's personality.

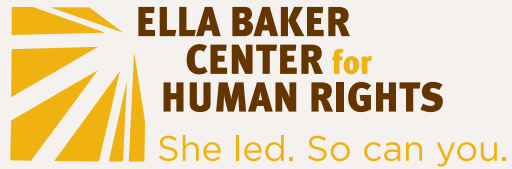
Differentiate Your Organization

What do you do better than other organizations? Highlight your distinct positioning in your tagline. Remember, too, that you're trying to set yourself apart not just from similar organizations, but from all the other organizations that might be requesting a donation, volunteer time, or other kinds of engagement. You want to be the reader's charity of choice.

Reinforce Your Broader Goals

Your organization is probably working from a strategic plan, even if it isn't written down. Be sure your tagline reflects your larger aims. Avoid being so clever or creative that the tagline conflicts with what you're actually trying to accomplish.

What to Do



Do Use or Imply the Word “You”

Other than “free,” there’s no better word than “you” to get someone’s attention. Direct address (“you” or an implied “you”) creates a compelling call to action that pulls in your audience.



OneJustice™

Protect the rights of Californians in need

Do Refer to the Problem Your Organization Exists to Solve

Don’t assume your audience understands the problem you’re working to address. Tell them about it or get them thinking about it in a way they might not have considered before. Be explicit and use words that evoke an image.

“All of our staff—and our entire board—now understand how they need to represent the wonderful work that we do. We’ve always known who we are, and know we know how to talk about it.”

Julia Wilson
Chief Executive Officer
OneJustice



Do something good for pets

Do Use Active Verbs

Active verbs involve the reader and reflect work in progress. Other forms might suggest that your mission has already been accomplished.

TIDES
WHAT’S POSSIBLE

Do Keep It Simple

Simple taglines are usually easier to remember. Focus on one idea and keep it short.

What Not to Do

Don't Leave the Reader Asking "So What?"

Providing Help. Creating Hope.
(Catholic Charities USA)

Create a tagline that feels active and urgent to engage the reader. Don't just flatly state what you do, and don't leave the reader out of the story.

Don't Be Vague

Building a Better New York
*(Lawyers Alliance for New York and
New York State Builders Association)*

A vague tagline is meaningless to the reader. If your tagline could just as easily be used by another organization, write a new one.

Don't Just Summarize Your Mission

Committed to ending the pandemic
and human suffering caused by HIV
(Former tagline of San Francisco AIDS Foundation)

Mission statements have a place, but not in taglines. Often long and factual, mission statements tend to bore the reader and certainly don't draw them in.

Don't Change Your Tagline More Than Once a Decade

Help Can't Wait
We'll be there.

Celebrating 125 years of service
(All from American Red Cross)

Avoid the temptation to change your tagline. Remember, only *you* will tire of it; members of your audience, who seldom hear from you, won't. Let your tagline carry your brand forward. It will pay dividends in the form of familiarity and closer relationships between you and your audiences. (There's **one** exception to this rule: if a major change in strategy or programs invalidates your current tagline, change it to reflect the new direction.)

Don't Write by Committee

If you involve a big group in writing a tagline (or mission statement or anything else) you'll be making a deadly mistake. Good ideas and strong communication get watered down when too many people weigh in. Be clear about your expectations and then assign the task of creating the new tagline to one or two people. Have them present their top three ideas to the whole group for a vote—not an edit, a vote—on the winner.

Don't Just Rephrase Your Name

Working Together to
Keep Coral Reefs Alive
(Coral Reef Alliance®)

Your tagline occupies precious real estate. Use it to enhance your appeal, not repeat the obvious. Even a short tagline should embody your goals.

Don't Risk a Misunderstanding

Pass on the Gift
(Heifer® International)

Study your tagline objectively. Could any of the words be taken the wrong way? Just because you know what you mean, doesn't mean your audience will.

Don't Use "-ing" Verbs

Protecting Ancient
Redwoods Since 1918.
(Save the Redwoods League)

Gerunds—the noun form of verbs, like "helping"—exclude the reader. They imply you have already accomplished the task at hand and don't need support.

Approaches That Work



EARTHJUSTICE
Because the earth needs a good lawyer

Answer the Question “Why?”

When you answer the question “Why?” you help articulate the benefit your organization provides. In one stroke, you identify the problem your organization exists to solve, engage the reader, refer to your organization’s broader goals, reinforce your organization’s leadership position on an issue, and create a compelling statement that can appeal to multiple stakeholders.



**NATIONAL
EQUITY
PROJECT**

Deliver on the promise
of a quality education

Command Action

Whatever issue you’re spotlighting, never leave your audience asking, “But what could I possibly do to help?” Your tagline should tell the reader what the problem is—and how they can play a role in solving it.



**Skyline
COLLEGE**

ACHIEVE

Single Words

Using just one word can be a great way to draw attention and quickly create an image in the reader’s mind. This is a good tagline because it’s short, memorable, aspirational, clear, and it involves the reader.



Tie Your Logo to Your Tagline

If you can redesign your logo at the same time that you rewrite your tagline, you can make a picture paint a thousand words.



Aspirational Statements

An aspirational statement (just like the answer to the unspoken “Why?”) helps the reader envision how the world could be if they helped you solve the problem at hand. It also establishes you as a leader on the issue.

Tricks of the Trade

The Un-Cliché

The American Heart Association took “live and learn” and flipped it to “learn and live.” A successful twist on a well-worn phrase.

Alliteration

Alliterative words start with the same consonant sound. That’s what made the old gasoline slogan “Put a tiger in your tank” so memorable.

Rhyme

Our brains love rhymes, which is why the Timex slogan “Takes a licking and keeps on ticking” stays with us.

Rhythm

Bounty brand paper towels’ “the quicker picker-upper” is fun to say. Not only does it rhyme, it has a great cadence.

Repetition

“The mission with a heart. In the heart of the city.” Central Union Mission, Washington, D.C. The repetition of the word “heart” helps this tagline stick in our heads.

Humor

“We answer to a higher authority.” This pun from Hebrew National hot dogs makes us smile—and remember their tagline.

Wordplay

The American Conservatory Theater’s tagline, “In good company,” plays on the double meaning of an excellent audience and a theater elevated by a core troupe of actors.

Imagery

“A mind is a terrible thing to waste.”
“From harm to home.”

The taglines of the United Negro College Fund and the International Rescue Committee are memorable because of the strong images they evoke.

The Writing Process

Know Your Audience

Picture a real person. What would motivate them to act?

Review Your Organization’s Goals

Write with your highest-level goals in mind. A good tagline reinforces them and gets the public to help you reach them.

Establish Your Voice

Like you, your organization has a personality. Decide how you want to come across. Friendly? Confident? Carefree? A tagline should reflect that personality.

Start Writing

A blank piece of paper or screen can be daunting, but it all gets easier once you put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. Start writing now. Even a terrible idea is a great start.

Keep Writing

You’ve come up with a few good ideas. Great. But don’t stop, because you’re just getting warmed up. You need 5–10 great taglines to choose from, and for that, you need to keep writing.

Test Your Taglines

The best testers of your potential new tagline are people in your target audience. Ask them how well your prospective taglines represent your organization.

Listen

Be willing to hear that the tagline you loved didn’t work and try to understand why. Take stock of the reactions you get and consider what kind of tagline could prove more effective for your organization.

Refine

It’s rarely effective to try to perfect a tagline in a vacuum. Hear what your test group has to say and workshop the best ideas.

With all the above in mind, you’re ready to give your own tagline a shot. Good luck and happy writing!

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a nonprofit’s success. Every day we guide nonprofits to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today’s world, a worthy mission is not enough. You’ve got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission Minded can help your organization, call us today at 415-990-9360.