



# Case Study: From Unnoticed to Funded

How Pholus Helped a  
Small NGO Land a Major  
Donor

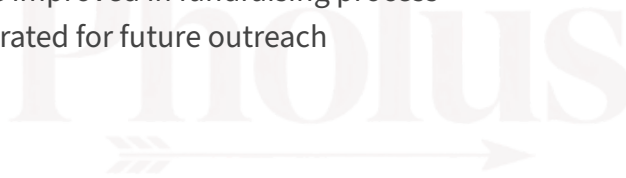
# Case Study: From Unnoticed to Funded — How Pholus Helped a Small NGO Land a Major Donor

## Executive Summary

A small NGO struggled to stand out to funders. Pholus refined their messaging, improved the website's clarity, and designed a donor outreach campaign that landed their first large institutional grant.

## Key Results & Indicators

- First major donor secured within 60 days
- Messaging clarity score increased via user testing
- Direct mail campaign exceeded expected response rate
- Staff confidence improved in fundraising process
- New leads generated for future outreach



## **Background**

A small but passionate NGO had been operating on minimal funding for several years. Its mission was clear: deliver community-based health and education programs to underserved rural populations. But despite the impact it had on the ground, the organization struggled to build trust with external donors — particularly large institutional or philanthropic funders.

The NGO's leadership team believed in their cause, but they knew their current approach wasn't working. Their website lacked cohesion, their messaging didn't communicate their results or credibility effectively, and they had no structured outreach campaign for major donors.

They engaged Pholus under a limited-scope advisory package to sharpen their external communications and improve donor readiness. What began as a small engagement quickly became the catalyst that unlocked their most significant funding win to date.

## **Step 1: Reframing the Message**

Pholus began by conducting a rapid audit of the NGO's website, digital assets, and pitch materials. The core issue was immediately clear: while the organization had powerful stories to tell, they were buried beneath outdated language, clunky formatting, and vague calls to action.

Our team worked with the NGO's leadership to:

- Clarify their value proposition for donors, making the organization's theory of change and impact easy to understand at a glance
- Replace emotionally generic phrases with concrete, trust-building language grounded in results, testimonials, and transparency
- Simplify the visual layout of the website and recommend low-cost design improvements that elevated professionalism without overhauling the entire site

Within two weeks, the NGO had updated key landing pages and collateral with a clearer voice and more strategic structure — and they started receiving more inquiries through their contact form immediately after.

## **Step 2: Building a Donor Target List**

Next, Pholus turned its attention to donor outreach. Many smaller NGOs struggle with prospecting because they either focus exclusively on massive global foundations or remain too localized in their thinking.

Pholus identified a mid-tier donor segment — regionally active family foundations, impact-driven private companies, and local development agencies with discretionary budgets — that were more likely to fund organizations of this size.

We created a custom list of 40 donor targets, segmented by interest area, geographic fit, and funding history. The list included:

- Names and titles of program officers or philanthropic decision-makers
- Recent grantee information to help the NGO tailor their messaging
- Contact channels and any notes on preferred submission windows

## **Step 3: Direct Mail That Felt Personal and Professional**

Email alone wasn't going to break through the noise. These funders received thousands of unsolicited pitches every year. So Pholus guided the NGO in designing a direct mail campaign that would land on the desks — not in the inboxes — of key decision-makers.

We helped the team create a three-part mailer package:

1. A cover letter from the Executive Director, personalized with donor-specific insight
2. A one-page impact brief summarizing outcomes, testimonials, and plans for scaling
3. A handwritten postcard from a program beneficiary, translated into English

Each package was printed and mailed individually. The NGO's team followed up with emails two weeks after delivery.

## **Step 4: The Breakthrough**

Roughly three weeks after the final batch of mailers went out, the NGO received a call from a regional philanthropic advisor who had read their packet and wanted to know more. Within a

month, they had entered into formal discussions with one of the target foundations on the list.

The foundation awarded the NGO a multi-year grant that exceeded their original expectations — enough to stabilize their existing programs and begin expanding outreach in new areas.

This was the first time the NGO had ever received significant institutional backing.

### **Outcome Highlights**

- Website bounce rate decreased by 28%, and average time on site increased
- Contact form submissions doubled within six weeks of the site refresh
- One major donor secured from the targeted list within 45 days of mailing
- Foundations began following the NGO's progress with a view to future support
- Internal team confidence and morale significantly improved

### **Why It Worked**

This case reflects a core strength of Pholus: knowing when to simplify, when to sharpen, and when to scale. We didn't try to turn the NGO into something it wasn't. Instead, we:

- Elevated what was already working
- Positioned them as credible and competent without hype
- Matched their efforts to donor expectations and outreach psychology
- Delivered a tailored list — not a generic grant database — that respected their bandwidth

### **Final Thoughts**

Sometimes, all an organization needs is a sharpened message, a better strategy, and a nudge in the right direction. Pholus helped this NGO speak clearly, look credible, and show up in the right rooms — and that made all the difference.

## About Pholus

Pholus is a discreet advisory firm that supports founders, boards, and stakeholders in fragile or complex environments. We specialize in quiet interventions, exit planning, and operational clarity when reputations, relationships, or resources are at risk.

**Need to navigate something delicate or high-stakes?** We work behind the scenes to help you stabilize, reset, or exit — without triggering avoidable fallout.

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