

Wake Up Your Name!

Red Rooster Group's
Guide to Naming Your
Nonprofit Organization



redroostergroup

36 EAST 23RD STREET, 602
NEW YORK, NY 10010
212.673.9353
www.redroostergroup.com
info@redroostergroup.com

Time for Your Nonprofit to Change its Name?

There are many reasons for nonprofit organizations to change their name. Whether out of opportunity and the desire to express the mission better and attract new donors, or out of necessity stemming from external factors. This article describes 15 reasons that prompt nonprofits to change their name.

- 1. Length is too long.** It's common for nonprofits to have Descriptive Names. But these tend to be long and are often referred to by their initials. The abbreviation loses the meaning for those not familiar with the organization and undermines the concept of having a Descriptive Name to begin with.
- 2. Services have changed.** Faced with changing needs or demands by their audience or funders, many organizations evolve by evolving their services or scope beyond their original mission. At some point, the name no longer represents what the organization does, and mismatch becomes too great enough to prompt the new name.
- 3. Geographic area no longer applies.** When an organization expands beyond the geographic scope specified in its name, or is planning on offering services beyond that area, a name change may be needed.
- 4. Outdated terms are used.** Since society's sensibilities and language changes over time, words like negro, Indian, retarded, and geriatric can be politically incorrect, have negative connotations, or simply no longer be effective. United Negro College Fund is now UNCF, what was the Association of Retarded Citizens is now The Arc.
- 5. The name no longer works.** In some case the organization's name no longer reflects what the organization does or is inaccurate in some way, or conveys a misperception about the organization. Real Estate Advisory and Development Services (READS) is a nonprofit organization serving other nonprofits, but its name made it seem like a business. To address this, they took the unusual tact of using their tagline, Build with Purpose, as their organizational name, and adopted a new tagline, "Real Estate for Social Change."
- 6. No one refers to the actual name.** Organizations such as the YMCA (which used to stand for Young Men's Christian Association), and the JCC (Jewish Community Center), are referred to informally by their members as "the



Time for Your Nonprofit to Change its Name?

Y,” and “the J,” respectively. Recently, the YMCA (which is a distinct organization from the YWCA, by the way) is taking advantage of that and referring to itself as “the Y,” introducing a new logo, which has the small letters YMCA on the side of a large Y.

7. The name is embarrassing.

When the Child Development Center was first established 30 years ago, it was among the first special education facilities in New Jersey. Now, with hundreds of competitors, the name is both inaccurate, since it is an accredited school, not a center, and embarrassing for teenager students who would refer to the school as CDC. The name Westbridge Academy instills pride and fits into the students’ and parents’ expectations.

8. Confusion with other organizations.

With the proliferation of nonprofits over the past several decades, there are now nearly 1 million nonprofits in the United States making it confusing for the public to distinguish between groups (and businesses) with similar missions, messages or names. Where once, a local charity was the only one of its kind, it must now compete with many other groups with similar missions, and a distinctive name can help it stand out.

9. Program is more prominent than the organization.

For some organizations, their signature programs are more well-known than the parent organization. This might represent a lost opportunity for funding or increasing participation in the organization’s other programs. That was the case for the Council on the Environment of New York, the group behind New York’s noted Greenmarkets. This prompted them to change their name to GrowNYC. When the Lance Armstrong Foundation’s yellow wristband reading Livestrong gained

massive recognition, the organization’s name was changed to the Livestrong Foundation.

10. Inconsistent use of the name.

In some cases, organizations have an official name but use it inconsistently or interchanged with other elements. For example, a public radio station sometimes uses its call letters as part of its name, sometimes identifies itself as a public radio station, and uses different taglines to convey different aspects of its message. Developing a single use of the name, or new name, can address these issues.

11. To remove the religious connotations.

As organizations once founded on religious principles attempt to appeal to wider audiences for funding, some are changing their names to remove or minimize the religious aspects. Another reason that Christian Children’s Fund had in changing its name to ChildFund International, was the ability to work in Muslim countries.

12. To signal change. Organizations that want to signal a new direction for the organization, choose to change their name. When the Solomon Schechter Day School Association wanted to proactively signal a new brand positioning for the Jewish Conservative Day School movement, they changed their name to Schechter Day School Network and introduced the tagline: Engage the world.

13. To hide from malfeasance. After advocacy organization ACORN was embroiled in a scandal, the negative ramifications rained down hard. Several of the organization’s statewide chapters renamed themselves to distance themselves from the problem. Other organizations, such as the American Red Cross, and the United Way, have stronger brands, allowing them to overcome scandals.

Time for Your Nonprofit to Change its Name?

- 14. Legal action.** Whether perceived, threatened, or actual, legal action from another entity claiming naming infringement or other violations may prompt an organization to change its name.
- 15. A merger.** When two or more organizations form one entity, sometimes one organization's name is adopted, and sometimes a new name is developed, often a combination of the two names.
- 16. Donor requirements.** A large donation, request from a funder, or special requirement or bequest may prompt the organization to incorporate the donor's name into the organizational, program or facility name.

...

Based on our experience with organizations looking to change their names, this is our list of reasons that we have seen. If your organization needs to change its name for another reason, please let me know, and I'll add it to this list.

Developing a New Name

If your organization is considering changing its name, there is a lot to think about. A new name can provide a renewed sense of vigor for the organization, but it can also be a frustrating process if not handled correctly. Keep in mind these factors for creating a successful outcome.

- 1. Recognize that developing an effective name is difficult.** With 1.6 million nonprofits in the United States, plus 21 million domain names, many good names and URLs are taken. Understand that it's not as easy as it seems to come up with the right name that perfectly expresses what your organization stands for, and is available.
- 2. You need a clear process.** From egos and office politics to the creativity needed to generate a great name, there are myriad aspects of the name change process that need to be managed. To ensure that everything goes smoothly, you need a rigorous process that clearly defines all the steps.
- 3. Understand why you are changing the name.** Changing out of necessity or opportunity will dictate different approaches.
- 4. Involve the right people.** Your name change is an opportunity to galvanize people around your shared vision, so be sure to include a the appropriate cross section from your staff, board, donors, partner organizations and other key constituents. The challenge is incorporating all perspectives so that everyone feels heard and managing the expectations that not all needs can be met.
- 5. Know where you stand.** Your organization is not operating in a vacuum. Conduct research to assess the level of brand recognition, positive and negative attributes, and audience perceptions of the name. What do people think of your name, and will they care if you change it?
- 6. Prepare for change.** Understand your organization's propensity for change and have strong leadership to usher the organization through the process and build consensus. It's important to consider people's potential responses to the name change and to be able to pro-actively address any resistance to change.
- 7. Know your target.** Before you start generating names, you need to know what you are aiming for. It helps to develop a Brand Statement that expresses that you want to convey, and to establish criteria for the new name. For example, whether the name needs to reflect your organization's mission, respect the organization's history, etc. What are the practical considerations, such as words that must be included or excluded, a tagline that must be used, a certain length, legal issues, chapter, parent or international affiliate considerations, or other expectations or limitations. Also consider the tone you want the name to convey.
- 8. Go wide.** In developing potential names, it pays to think outside the box and gener-



Developing a New Name for Your Nonprofit

ate hundreds of potential possibilities. Cast a wide net to get the best ideas, and then edit them down based on your criteria.

9. **Respect nuances.** Understand the subtle differences between words that can effect the perception of a name and what is acceptable. For example, the words “network,” “clearinghouse,” and “association,” all have to do with the exchange of information, but they all have different connotations.
10. **Be creative.** Nonprofit names don’t have to be mundane — they can and should be appealing. So aim for one that will capture the imagination of your staff, donors, and clients, not merely describe your services. Which would you rather support: Jumpstart NYC or the New York City Small Businesses Administration Program?
11. **Connecting with the old name.** Consider if the old name should be recognized in some way (such as “formerly...”) and how that should be done (with the old logo, or just a line of type, how prominent, and for how long, etc.). Having this plan beforehand, can help you make judicious decisions regarding the best way to roll out the new name and in replacing old stationery and materials and updating your website.
12. **Look smart.** Your name will usually not live alone, but must be represented graphically. Consider how the name works with the logo or tagline. If you are going to change the name, take advantage of the opportunity to create a positive impression by developing a unified visual identity for the organization.
13. **Field test.** Before settling on a final name, see how it works in various contexts, for example, on a business card, on your website (how it works as a URL), on interior and exterior signs, when answering the phone or on voice mail, in directory listings, etc.
14. **Spread the word.** It’s best to have a plan for informing your different audiences appropriately in a timed sequence, for example, starting with the staff and board and moving out toward large funders and donors and partners before announcing it to the public. Your strategy will depend upon the size and nature of your organization and its board (or multiple boards), and other constituents including size and type of donor base, funding sources, organizational partners, and clients served.
15. **Implement smartly.** Consider the full scope of what needs to be changed and have a plan for managing that. For example, you may have a hard launch in which the new name is introduced on a certain date, or a soft launch in which older stationery and materials are used up and the new name is introduced when new materials are created (within a certain time frame). And plan for staff training on how to and when to use the new name.

...

A great name can give your organization the recognition it needs, so take the proper steps to plan appropriately for success.

Types of Nonprofit Names

The name of your organization can say a lot about your organization's mission, values, and aspirations. While a great name won't guarantee a steady stream of funds, it can help distinguish your organization in this increasingly competitive world. Conversely, a poor name may confuse your organization with another or misrepresent your mission, losing the opportunity to appeal to donors who care about your cause. Here are some types of names to consider.

Descriptive

As it indicates, Descriptive Names merely tells what the organization does, such as the **Children's Aid Society**. While Descriptive is the most common type of nonprofit name, there is an abundance of organizations with descriptive names that are unsuccessful. Many are bland, uninspired, and too long. In choosing a Descriptive Name, consider the problem the organization solves and the main benefits it provides, as opposed to description of the actions it takes. The name needs to inspire, so consider the emotional impact, which can make a huge difference in how people feel about your organization.

Geographic

Descriptive names are often combined with the location of the organization, such as **The Boys Choir of Harlem, Louisville Zoo Foundation, and the 92nd Street Y**, or the area that the organization serves (**The Himalayan Cataract Project**). While originating as a point of distinction between other groups with similar missions, a geographic-based name can become a limitation should the organization seek to expand outside the named area.

Person's Name

From **Hale House** to the **Ellington Fund**, founders' or funders' names are often used. Since celebrities' names are their greatest asset, naming their foundations after themselves, such as **The Michael J. Fox Founda-**

tion for Parkinson's Research, and Lance Armstrong's Foundation (renamed **Livestrong** after their yellow bracelets created a world-wide sensation) lends immediate visibility and credibility to the charity.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach. A person's name provides the opportunity for the organization to tell a compelling story of its founder and to galvanize people around a magnetic personality. The limitation is that the equity or good will is built up around an individual, and it may be difficult to shift it to the organization when the founder steps down. Name recognition can also take time to build up, while scandal can easily roil the accumulated amity. And sometimes, these types of names don't describe what the organization does.

And as corporations increasingly step up their philanthropic endeavors, watch for business names to become more commonly associated with charities such as the **Avon Walk for Breast Cancer**, which is actually the well-known event of the **Avon Foundation**, the philanthropic arm of **Avon Products, Inc.**

Conceptual

This type of name implies a meaning or metaphor that relates to the organization's mission. The name **Red Cross** is derived from inverting the colors on Switzerland's flag to symbolize the organization's neutral status, which allows it to deliver aid to ravaged countries. Their immense name recogni-

Types of Nonprofit Names

tion is owed to its long and successful history (founded in 1881 by Clara Barton), simple name, and widely recognized icon, now indelibly linked to the concept of medical care.

Using a generic word as a name has both advantages and disadvantages. The name **Crossroads** conjures a powerful visual metaphor and is thus used by many organizations, which creates problems distinguishing between them. The organization **Breakthrough**, which uses popular culture and media to affect social change, also faces competition for its name, but is a bit more unique.

Combinations

One way to generate a unique name is to combine two words. **KICKSTART**, which builds moral character in youth through martial arts, suggests its mission in a concise, emotionally upbeat moniker that combines two generic words to create a name.

Made Up

To truly achieve a unique name, you can concoct a word. George Eastman's camera company created the word **Kodak** because it had the hard 'K' to start and finish the word, making the name sound modern. This unusual construction creates uniqueness and consequently aids memory.

In the closing quarter of last century, the technique of combining various Latin roots became common and resulted in the auto brand **Acura** suggesting accurate and **Lexus** implying excellence. The pharmaceutical industry uses this technique for naming drugs, such as the name **Prozac** helped fluoxetine hydrochloride become the best-selling anti-depression medication.

Linguistic naming techniques can be very effective, but are not commonly used in the nonprofit sector since it is expensive to generate good names this way and requires

a significant investment in order to imbue the name with meaning and reinforce it for recognition.

Sounds

While not widely used, words mimicking sounds can create an effective name if there is enough of a connection between the name and the sound. Search engine **Yahoo!** successfully uses the sound of a joyous discovery; however, a nonprofit called **KABOOM!**, which rallies people around the cause of playgrounds, belies its mission of providing a safe haven for kids by employing the sound of an explosion as its name.

Foreign Words

Sometimes foreign words provide good names, particularly when they are short and sound good. **Kiva**, the micro lending site, is a Swahili word that means "unity" or "agreement," which works for them even if you don't know the meaning – perhaps because two of the four letters subtly mimic the word give.

Abbreviations

In the nonprofit sector, abbreviations are usually the result of a name that is too long to say easily in conversation. In these cases, the abbreviation is a bridge to a series of meaningless letters. Large organizations that have been around for more than half a century, such as **IBM**, **AT&T**, or the **UJA** (formally, the UJA – Federation of New York), may be known by their initials without the need to know what the abbreviation actually stands for (UJA was the United Jewish Appeal, which merged with the Jewish Federation three decades ago). Some organizations such as **AIPAC**, **AJWC**, and **HIAS** are known by their initials, at least in Jewish circles, but their full names are not lost among their audience.

Some abbreviated names are abbreviated even further (even down to one letter) as in

Types of Nonprofit Names

the case of the **YMCA** organization which recently rebranded themselves as simply the **Y** (but they still use the letters YMCA on their logo just in case). Their Jewish counterparts, the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association) were renamed **Jewish Community Center** a few decades ago (although it was voluntary and some are still Ys), are referred to as the **JCC**, although members would say they were going to the J.

Acronyms

Carefully crafted acronyms, such as **K.I.D.S.** (Kids in Distressed Situations) or **M.A.D.D.** (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers), actually help to reinforce the name, in the first case by specifying the population served, and in the second, conveying the emotion felt by victims of drunk driving, a strong emotional appeal, often lacking in nonprofit names.

CARE, the leading humanitarian organization and originator of the CARE package, benefits from a fantastic acronym that describes its mission succinctly. The conglomeration of relief agencies which was founded in 1945 as "Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe," now says the acronym stands for "Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc." although the organization has become so well known that its longhand name is no longer referred to even on its own website.

...

With a chance to create a new organizational name comes the opportunity for visibility, utility, and a bit of showmanship. So make it a good one.

Nonprofit Naming Checklist

Deciding whether to change the name of your organization should take into account many factors. While not exhaustive, this list should get you thinking about some marketing, legal, funding and logistical issues to consider. And remember to market-test any names you are considering (even informally to staff and clients) and hire an attorney to do the proper searches to ensure that prospective names are available and protectable.

Marketing

- Does the name support your mission and branding attributes?
- Does the name distinguish your organization from your competition?
- Does the name inspire confidence?
- Does the name have a positive connotation?
- What other intellectual property (publication names, product names, etc. will be effected by the name change?
- What other divisions or affiliates will be affected by the name?
- Does the name have a positive emotional component?
- Does the name suggest something physical?
- Does the name have a metaphorical meaning?

- Does the name appeal to your audiences?
- Will the name allow your organization to expand services?
- How easy is the name to spell?
- How easy is the name to say?
- Does the name translate well into other languages?
- Will the name help your search engine marketing efforts?
- Is an appropriate domain name available?
- Is the name available in social media contexts?

Funding

- Will the new name effect current funding sources?
- Will a new name help to attract new funding sources?
- How will having a new name effect charity rating services or watchdog organizations?

Logistics

- How long will it take to change the name of your organization?
- Who needs to be involved in the process?
- Who needs to approve the new name?
- What will it cost to change the name?



Nonprofit Naming Checklist

- What is involved in getting board and staff acclimated to new name? What training is needed?
- What will you have to update with the new name?
 - Marketing materials (stationery, business cards, brochures, etc.)
 - Online marketing (website, email templates, and other online marketing)
 - Directory listings (phone books, charity lists, etc.)
 - Signs (interior, exterior)
 - Vehicles and Uniforms (shirts, name tags, etc.)
 - Internal systems (billing systems, phone system, etc.)
 - Customers and vendors and partners (and their systems)

Legal

- With what government or other agencies will you have to register?
- Can you be incorporated under one name and use another name for business?
- How will a name change effect filing taxes or other reporting or accountability issues?
- Is the new name legally protectable / unique enough from other organizations to avoid infringement?

To Mimic Another Nonprofit's Name?

Doctors Without Borders is a successful name. But what about other organizations that copy the name like Lawyers without Borders or Engineers without Borders? Is that a smart strategy? This article provides an answer.

Names Provide a Shorthand for Understanding

Since many nonprofits' missions are complex, the name of the organization can act as shorthand in helping people understand what they do. The name Doctors Without Borders does this very well. You get a clear picture of doctors personally helping other people regardless of nationality, politics or religion.

So it is understandable that other organizations, such as Lawyers Without Borders, Engineers Without Borders, and other organizations using that naming formula, would want to capitalize on that same shorthand to explain their mission. After all, why go through a lengthy description what you do, if there is already a framework that people are familiar with?

A Strong Name Is Essential for Recognition

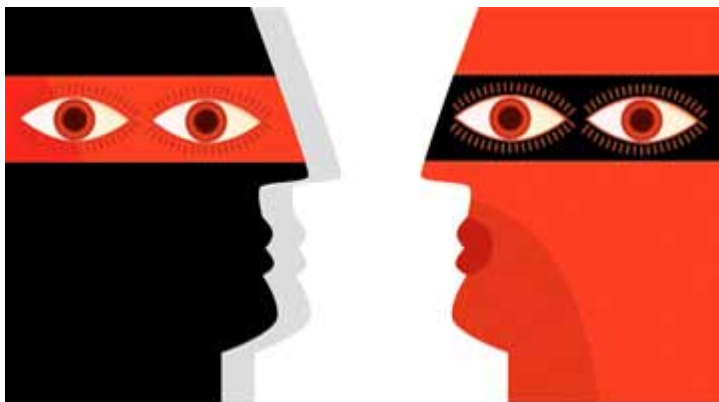
It's a very busy world, and there is a lot of competition – with about a million nonprofits registered in the United States, the public has a difficult time distinguishing between groups with similar missions or similar names. Nonprofits need to do everything they can to stand out. Lacking large marketing budgets for advertising or online promotion, an organization's name plays an important role in catching people's attention, distinguishing the organization, and conveying its mission.

A Memorable Name

What makes Doctors Without Borders a strong brand, is that its model was innovative and compelling when it was founded nearly 40 years ago. The concept of flying doctors into another country to help people in need captured people's imaginations. It exemplified the best of humanity and selflessness. And with its uniqueness and memorability, it is no surprise that it became a very strong brand.

The Problem of Copying a Unique Name

The problem with other organizations that borrow the nomenclature, is that they are not the first group to use that approach, and so they can't really capitalize on that uniqueness. Being the first organization to create a new model for service counts for something. People like to donate to leaders. So while organizations that copy that model gain the advantage of easily conveying their mission, they lose the ability to claim uniqueness and a leadership role. And as a result their fundraising appeal is not going to be as strong.



To Mimic Another Nonprofit's Name?

Part of the fundraising appeal is the relevance of your mission. Times have changed since Doctors Without Borders was created. The concept of helping people across borders is no longer unique. The internet allows people to assess and help people in other countries directly. Emphasize the organizations impact

An organization founded more recently should take this into consideration. People like to know what impact their donations have, so a better naming strategy would be to emphasize the impact that the organization achieves (for example, emphasizing how the lawyers and engineers are changing people's lives).

Search Engine Considerations

Another consideration these days, is how names appear in search engines. Using part of the name of another organization limits the unique words that are searchable. For example, searching for "without borders, non-profit" in Google, delivers pages of results, all vying for attention, and the one that started it all (Doctors Without Borders) is lost in the mix.

Religious Nonprofits are Rebranding to Attract Wider Audiences

As nonprofits continue to reconsider their strategies in the face of difficult economic conditions, many organizations are changing their names and rebranding to remove religious connotations, allowing them to appeal to a broader audience. The underlying reasons for the name change vary, since various types of nonprofit organizations face different issues according to their religious affiliation, audiences, or community they serve.

International Organizations

When international aid organization **Christian Children's Fund** changed its name to **ChildFund International**, the goal was to position the 70-year-old organization for future success. They reacted to both internal and external factors, such as new constituent needs, adapting to local markets to be more effective in executing their mission, and clarifying the relationship with their funding organization, ChildFund Alliance, a network of 12 charities from which the group receives a third of its budget. Also, removing the word Christian from their name helps to reach a wider donor base.

The name change is part of a larger shift in strategy. Anne Goddard, the charity's president, said the group will tailor programs to children and place a greater emphasis on the relationship between poverty and children's well being. Also, it will enable the charity to work in countries not predominantly Christian, such as Afghanistan. There are some challenges, however, with the name change. ChildFund International will lose some donors who believed they were supporting a religious organization, Ms. Goddard said. Yet the charity's new name allows it to pursue grants from corporations and foundations, which had not supported the group in the past.

As organizations consider changing their name, it's critical to earn internal support for the brand. ChildFund International engaged employees and donors in the process. The charity conducted focus groups with donors, contacted people who received help from the charity overseas, and discussed the idea with board and staff members. When trustees voted to change the organization's name, ChildFund International sent mailings to supporters explaining the decision and welcoming questions. Also, staff members participated in a contest choosing the name of the child's figure in the group's new logo.

National Organizations

On a national level, associations that represent religious organizations hold a particular responsibility in representing and promoting their members' wide-ranging needs when considering changing names.

In the Jewish world, **The Solomon Schechter Day School Association**, an umbrella organization of 49 schools in the Conservative movement, has rebranded itself as the **Schechter Day School Network**, with a new marketing strategy and logo. The change was in response to issues of shrinking enrollment and competition from newer community day schools as well as Hebrew charter schools.

Religious Nonprofits are Rebranding to Attract a Wider Audience

Their challenge was highlighted in the findings of a 2008 UJA-Federation study called “To Go Or Not To Go,” revealing that many liberal Jews in New York area were unaware of the differences between Orthodox day schools and non-Orthodox ones, perceiving both as “insular” and weak in secular subjects.

As a result, Schechter unveiled a new tagline: “Engage The World,” that positions them in a more secular way, as well a bright red “rose compass” as a logo meant to evoke a Star of David to keep some reference to Judaism. The new branding helps to emphasize that Schechter schools are open to Modern Orthodox, Reform and secular families as well — and the differences between them and community schools are not always especially noticeable.

Local Organizations

Local organizations face similar issues. In Greenwich, Connecticut, the **Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Academy** rebranded itself as the **Carmel Academy**. In this case the name change references the Carmel Mountain range in northern Israel, to highlight the school’s connection to the country. “Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Academy really talked a lot more about location than the vision and the character of the school,” Head of School Nora Anderson said. The new name shifts the emphasis from the specific

focus on the Hebrew language to a more general approach of teaching Jewish values, which appeals to a larger potential audience for the school. Instead of changing their organizational name, some nonprofits are addressing the religious connotations of their name in other ways.

For **Incarnation Camp**, the oldest camp in America which is funded in part by the Episcopal Church, changing the name of the camp was not a viable option. Instead, they emphasized division names like **Pequot and Sherwood**, which have the cachet of a traditional overnight camp.

The organization’s logo still appears on the camp’s marketing materials, but in a less prominent way. This is part of a longer term plan to transition to using Pequot and Sherwood more predominantly to attract new campers, while keeping the identity of the camp recognizable for alumni.

Regardless of the type of change, effectively communicating the organization’s strategy and receiving input from staff and donors is important in getting buy in and ensuring the success of the initiative. Understanding people’s changing opinions about religion and the role of nonprofits in society is essential if individual nonprofits and the sector as a whole are to remain relevant.

> For more articles like this, visit:
www.redroostergroup.com