



Clean Records Fueled The University of Washington's \$2.7 Billion Breakthrough



Inaccurate data, outdated contacts, incomplete records, and duplicates overwhelm non-profit organizations as they strive to increase donations. This case study explores how the University of Washington leveraged Melissa's solutions to gain accurate insights into donor behavior — and fuel a \$2.7 breakthrough.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, we create, capture, copy, or consume **402.89 million** terabytes of data. However, volume isn't always a good indicator of success; accuracy is essential. Without it, almost any data is rendered useless. Non-profit organizations collect data from countless sources — surveys, financial reports, partner submissions — in a wide range of formats, including CSV, JSON, PDFs, and Excel exports. If left unchecked, a single typo can cascade into undeliverable mailings, misdirected emails, and missed opportunities.

With contact information flowing in from many sources, the University of Washington was challenged to tend to data entry errors and duplicate records. Moreover, with the constant changes in donor information, records quickly became out of date, leading to undeliverable mail, excessive production costs, and lost fundraising opportunities.

THE CHALLENGE

- Multiple data sources caused inconsistent, duplicate, and outdated donor records
- Frequent changes in donor information led to rapidly outdated contact details
- Undeliverable mail, wasted postage, and excessive production costs
- Missed critical fundraising opportunities due to poor data quality

THE SOLUTION

- Melissa's data quality solutions cleaned and verified over 900,000 contacts
- The data quality suite: address, phone, and email verification, plus name-parsing
- Ensured consistency across student, staff, alumni, and event attendee records
- Standardized and corrected international contacts for global fundraising

THE BENEFIT

- Reduced undeliverable mail and postage waste, cutting operational costs
- Increased fundraising efficiency and communication accuracy
- Raised more than \$2.7 billion in the most recent campaign
- Enabled deeper analysis of donor behavior and alumni fundraising potential



NON-PROFITS MUST ENSURE DATA QUALITY

Despite being a fundraiser's vital asset, data presents challenges, including quality and consistency issues and inconsistent usage across teams. **91%** of businesses suffer from common data quality issues, and this rings more true for non-profits.

More than **75%** of non-profits lack a formal data strategy, leaving them vulnerable to inaccurate data, outdated contacts, incomplete records, and duplicates. Without clean, accurate data, non-profits can't effectively identify new supporters, understand current donors' needs, or boost donor lifetime value. In fact, approximately 6.8% of non-profit emails bounce, indicating issues with outdated or incorrect contact information.

Maintaining proper data hygiene delivers tangible benefits for non-profits as digital adoption drives exponential growth in available information. As organizations adopt data-driven strategies that consistently outperform traditional approaches, inconsistent donor data practices emerge as a significant obstacle. Personalization preferences enhance campaign creativity but fragment donor records, and relying on a single data source restricts insights and weakens outreach effectiveness. This fragmentation usually stems from disparate systems that prevent a comprehensive view of each supporter, leaving non-profits with only basic fields because consolidating first-party data across platforms remains resource-intensive.

Without a holistic understanding of donor behavior, non-profits cannot accurately identify trends, customize campaigns, or cultivate meaningful connections, which ultimately limits fundraising potential.

“ This enabled us to really connect the dots, find new relationships, and capitalize on the many ways our supporters want to contribute. ”

– SHAWN DREW, FORMER DIRECTOR
OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR
THE OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT

DATA FRAGMENTATION, RECORD DECAY, AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Fractured, unreliable donor data was the core challenge at the University of Washington, impeding their donor acquisition efforts. Contact information, ranging from student records to alumni events and sporting attendees, created a tangled web of data entry errors, duplicate records, and inconsistencies.

This chaos was compounded by the constant flux of donor details, as they change addresses, switch phone numbers, and migrate to new email providers, rarely notifying every department in real time. This made it nearly impossible to maintain up-to-date information.

In short, data decay was a direct threat to the university's ability to sustain and grow its fundraising momentum. Without continuous updates, once-valuable profiles go stale, turning what should be personal outreach into undeliverable mail and dead-end calls.

“ We had so much data to contend with and knew it was important to bring in an expert in Data Quality. ”

– MIKE VISAYA, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR IM, STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES

ENSURING CLEAN, COMPLIANT AND CONNECTED DATA WITH MELISSA

Regular email communications are the single most effective way to drive repeat donations — 48% of donors say it's what keeps them engaged. To broaden their communication efforts, the university needed clean, parsed, and up-to-date donor records to provide the foundation for actionable analytics and targeted campaign design.

“Before implementing the Melissa solution, we would rarely mail internationally,” says **Darane Oakley** (Developer, University of Washington). Choosing Melissa to organize their data enabled them to ensure precision at every step and evolve outreach.

Melissa's Data Quality Suite gave the university full control over contact data by standardizing, verifying, and correcting postal addresses, emails, phone numbers, and names. This enabled UW to cut down on undeliverable mail, lower postage and production costs, and reduce the need for manual data cleanup. Melissa also helped them allocate resources toward more strategic donor engagement and long-term relationship building.

With refined donor behavior and demographics data, the university can develop personalized appeals, segment audiences effectively, and create a fundraising strategy that speaks directly to individual donor motivations and capacities.

QUALITY DATA UNRAVELS NEW FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES

Melissa made it possible for the university to keep donor records well-structured and consistently up to date. Thanks to modern data quality solutions, the university cleaned and verified over 900,000 contacts to guarantee more precise audience segmentation, more relevant messaging, and stronger predictive models around giving patterns. **Thanks to these capabilities, the University of Washington secured over \$2.7 billion in new contributions.**

“ With the breadth of accurate data we now have, we have dispelled the myth that athletics donors will not give to academics. ”

– MIKE VISAYA, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR IM, STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES



900K+
contacts
cleaned



\$2.7B
in donations
enabled



**GLOBAL
DONOR DATA
STANDARDIZED**

INSTANTLY VERIFY AND CORRECT CONTACT DATA AT POINT OF ENTRY

Up to **20%** of contact records contain errors, causing undeliverable mail, email bounces, and costly inefficiencies. Melissa's Data Quality Suite helps non-profits clean and optimize their databases to improve targeting, reduce waste, and boost campaign performance.

Over 10,000 global organizations depend on Melissa to improve delivery timelines, strengthen communication workflows, enhance analytics, and drive measurable growth.

With four decades of specialized experience in address validation and data quality, Melissa integrates diverse, global data sources with modern technology to keep your customer records accurate and reliable.

FUND YOUR MISSION WITH THE DATA QUALITY SUITE

- Format and validate global addresses across 240+ countries and territories
- Accurately identify and structure diverse names using a library of 650,000+ first and last names
- Confirm phone line status, attach geo-location data, and ensure numbers are ready for contact
- Check email syntax, verify domain accuracy, and run SMTP tests to confirm inbox reachability

Faulty contact details stall your non-profit's impact. Fundraisers must leverage modern tools to streamline their donor database and empower their outreach efforts.



About Melissa:

Melissa is a leading provider of data quality, identity verification and address management solutions. Melissa helps companies to acquire and retain customers, validate and correct contact data, optimize marketing ROI and manage risk. Melissa has been a trusted partner in improving customer communications for companies such as Mercury Insurance, Xerox, Disney, AAA and Nestlé since 1985. For more information, see www.melissa.com

Improve Fundraising Opportunities with Robust Contact Data Verification

Try Melissa