

CORE NUMBER TIPS

Your Core Number quickly explains how much it costs you to deliver a unit of service.

It *meaningfully* represents what your nonprofit does and quickly shows donors how their support will make a difference.

Sample Unit of Service

Your unit of service is the smallest amount of work your nonprofit does.

For example, a food pantry gives out emergency food boxes and finds that most recipients are families of 4. They could use the number of food boxes they give out as their unit of service (1 box/1 family), but they can narrow it down further. If they can estimate the number of meals provided in the box, they could use 1 meal/1 person as their unit of service and that number will be more impressive than the number of boxes given out. Plus, the average person understands “1 meal” better than “1 box.”

Type of Nonprofit	Possible unit of service
Food bank/pantry	1 box/family or 1 meal/person
Animal shelter	1 day/night of care for 1 animal
Homeless shelter	1 night for 1 person
After school program	1 hour of tutoring/snack for 1 student
Arts (theatre, ballet, museum)	1 hour of experience for 1 attendee
Health care	1 treatment/visit for 1 person
Housing	1 day of shelter for 1 person
Literacy	1 class for 1 person
Advocacy	Reach 1 person with 1 message or change 1 law
Education	1 hour or 1 class for 1 student
Hospice	1 hour or 1 day of support for caregivers and patients

What if...

(Common questions about Core Number)

My nonprofit has a lot of different programs...

Calculating your Core Number can be tough if you have lots of programs that seem really different. So, look for an overarching theme to your programs. For example, YMCA offers all kinds of athletic facilities, classes, and more. What do they all have in common? It's about improving someone's health. So, they could use 1 hour/1 person as their unit of service. Or 1 experience/1 person if people are spending more than 1 hour and using a variety of services. For a food pantry, it might be 1 meal/1 person, regardless of whether they receive an emergency food box or a meal at a soup kitchen. Just find the common denominator of the mission of your nonprofit and use that.

My nonprofit is new and we don't have any numbers yet...

If your nonprofit is new or you don't have numbers yet, use estimates. Be conservative as you think about how many units of service you'll provide over the next year and how much your expenses will be. Then in your fundraising, you can tell people "We anticipate it will cost x to provide [unit of service]."

I don't understand which expenses to include in the calculation...

As you calculate your Core Number, use ALL expenses, not just ones directly related to programs. It takes ALL expenses to operate your nonprofit, so use them all, even pest control, waste removal, and bookkeeping fees. This provides the donor an accurate picture of what it actually takes to provide services.

My Core Number is too high...

If you think your Core Number is too high, try this: First, see if there's a way you can use a smaller unit of service. For example, if your organization serves kids in an afterschool program, you could count a day/kid as your unit of service. But, let's say those kids are with you for 2-3 hours each day before they go home. You might use 1 hour/kid for your unit of service to reduce your Core Number.

If there's not a way to reduce your unit of service, just be ready to explain why it's high. It's likely that the work you do requires high quality team or intensive services and the number just is what it is.

We operate under a fiscal sponsor. How does this work for us?...

If your organization has a fiscal sponsor or if you work under the umbrella of a church or other organization, calculating a Core Number can be a little more difficult but not impossible to do. Try to get the help of their bookkeeper to help you with the numbers you need. If the other organization provides space to you rent free or other services, then you don't have to count those. Just count what YOUR nonprofit spends money on and calculate your Core Number based on that. Then you can explain to donors and prospects how the other organization supports you, providing rent or services, letting you focus your efforts on delivering programs and services.

Additional Resources

Read more on our blog and see some examples of Core Number in action:

<https://getfullyfunded.com/calculate-one-number-make-fundraising-easier/>

Core Number Calculator

Get help doing the math to find your Core Number using our Core Number Calculator:

<https://getfullyfunded.com/core-number-calculator/>