ASCEND:BLO Mid-Year 2021 Catchafire Survey

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By Learning and Evaluation Team: Rogeair Purnell, Melissa Mendes Campos, and Shiree Teng

ASCEND BLO + Catchafire

Catchafire is an organization that provides nonprofit organizations with equitable access to skilled volunteers to address critical needs related to everything from finance and operations to marketing and communication to technology. The East Bay Community Foundation (EBCF) has encouraged members of their Black-led Organization (BLO) Network, a membership group of over 400 organizations located throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, to take advantage of the Catchafire pro-bono support.

In March 2022, Catchafire staff launched their annual mid-year survey to explore the impact of this work through "case studies, testimonials, and deliverables that showcase organizations' experiences with Catchafire's platform and volunteer base" (Catchafire PPT presentation).

Of the 119 of BLO Network Members who were invited to access Catchafire's services, 72 or 60% registered on the Catchafire site, and 35 of those posted projects; 47 were not registered. Over 100 organization representatives (n=119) were invited to complete the mid-year survey, and 18 submitted a response for a response rate of 15%. Of the 18 respondents, 13 had posted projects and were matched with a Catchafire volunteer. Another five had posted projects but were not matched or did not receive services from a volunteer.
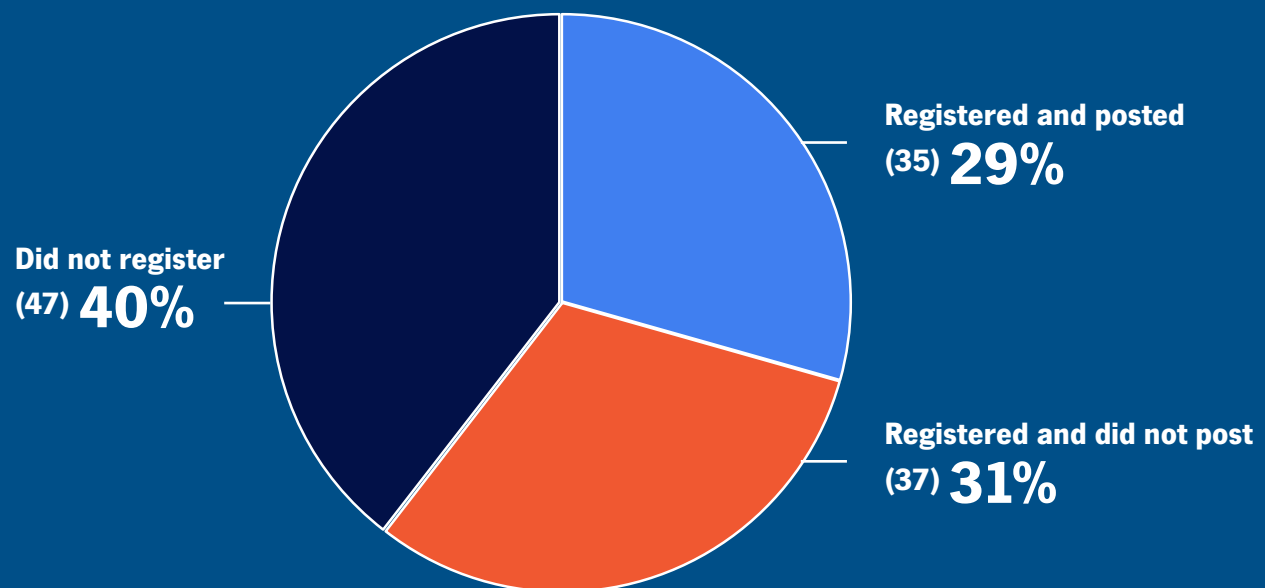
This report summarizes the 18 BLO Network members' responses and is divided into four sections:

I. Catchafire Users: describes the motivations, derived benefits, and experiences of the BLO Network Member organizations who worked with Catchafire volunteers.

II. Non-Users: describes the barriers or other reasons organizations did not work with Catchafire.

III. COVID Context: summarizes respondents' plans to use, or not use, Catchafire to adapt to COVID.

IV. Other Potential Uses and Interests: summarizes respondents' anticipated future needs.

1. Catchafire Users

This section describes the motivations, derived benefits, and experiences of the BLO Network Member organizations who did work with Catchafire.

Motivation to Post (n=13)

All respondents named the opportunity to access needed skills or knowledge as a motivator. More than three-fourths were attracted by the ability to get work done for free, and nearly two-thirds welcomed the chance to complete a strategic project.

- **13 (100%)** Opportunity to access professionals with skills or knowledge I/my team didn't have
- **10 (77%)** Ability to get work done for free
- **8 (62%)** Ability to complete a strategic project
- **4 (31%)** Ability to quickly check items off my to-do list
- **3 (23%)** Opportunity to expand my / my organization's network
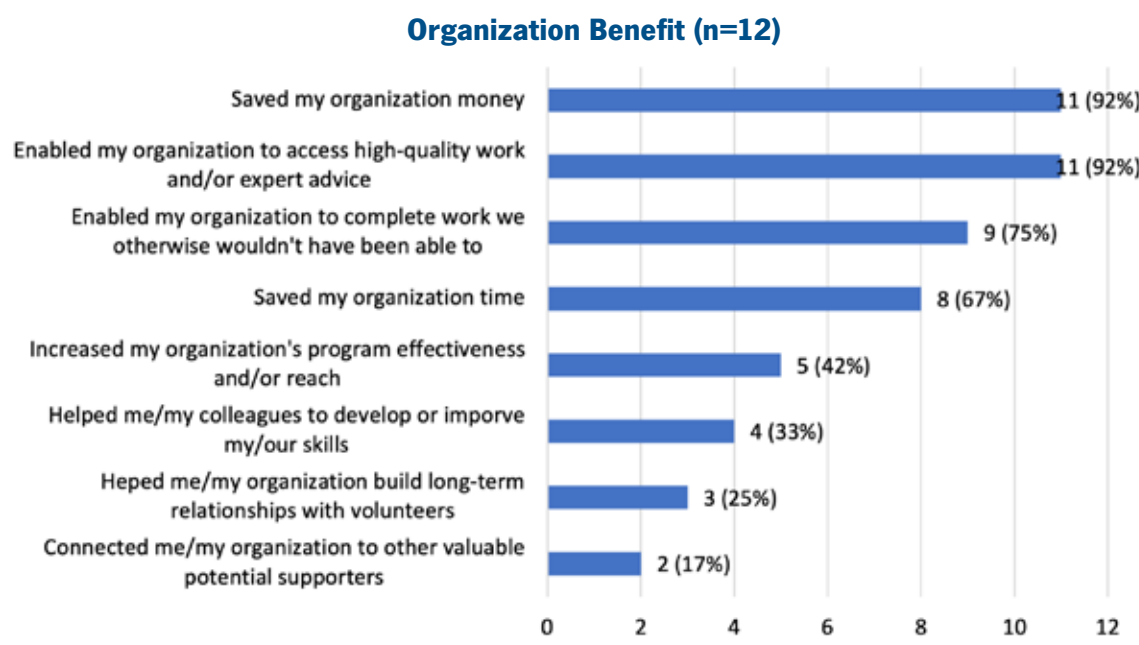
Motivation to Post (n=13)
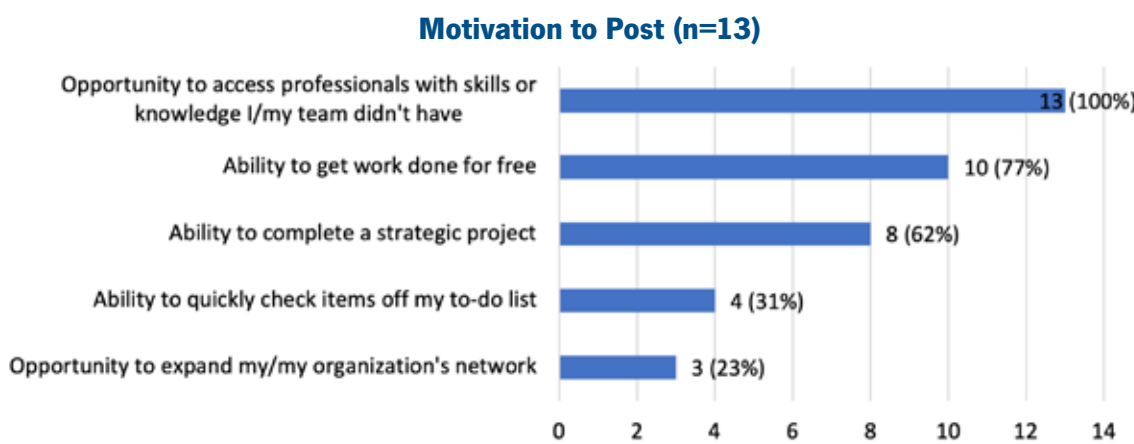
Organizational Benefit (n=12)

Almost all, or 92% said that working with Catchafire saved them money and enabled them to access high quality work and/or advice.

> ❝ *I'm using the Catchafire platform to focus on enhancing our organization's design and structure to foster board development and strategic planning. It has been great. The volunteers have been engaged and committed. The advice has been extremely helpful and having a neutral 3rd party providing guidance has accelerated my team's commitment and actions. Additionally, I have plans to initiate Catchafire projects in website redesign, fundraising planning, and partnership proposal.*

Three-quarters said that it enabled their organization to do work it otherwise would not have been able to complete and two-thirds commented on how the support saved the organization another important resource: time.

- **11 (92%)** Saved my organization money
- **11 (92%)** Enabled my organization to access high-quality work and/or expert advice
- **9 (75%)** Enabled my organization to complete work we otherwise wouldn't have been able to
- **8 (67%)** Saved my organization time
- **5 (42%)** Increased my organization's program effectiveness and/or reach
- **4 (33%)** Helped me / my colleagues to develop or improve my / our skills
- **3 (25%)** Helped me / my organization build long-term relationships with volunteers
- **2 (17%)** Connected me / my organization to other valuable potential supporters

Organization Benefit (n=12)

Benefit	Value
Saved my organization money	11 (92%)
Enabled my organization to access high-quality work and/or expert advice	11 (92%)
Enabled my organization to complete work we otherwise wouldn't have been able to	9 (75%)
Saved my organization time	8 (67%)
Increased my organization's program effectiveness and/or reach	5 (42%)
Helped me/my colleagues to develop or imporve my/our skills	4 (33%)
Heped me/my organization build long-term relationships with volunteers	3 (25%)
Connected me/my organization to other valuable potential supporters	2 (17%)

Impact on Program and Beneficiaries

Several described the impact in terms of technical skills and expertise used to develop their operational capacity in areas like marketing and communications, evaluation, governance, and more—all of which, in turn, benefits their ultimate beneficiaries. These statements are their responses to the question:

Will your beneficiaries and/or programmatic work be directly impacted by the work you accomplished through Catchafire?

> *All of the projects have been integral to our growth. From a web site to grant writers, to marketing decks, we are blessed to have been involved with Catchafire volunteers!*

> *Absolutely, we've gotten our website updated, which highlights our work, we've had surveys completed which will give us the ability to measure our impact and saved me lots of time and provided capacity that I have not had.*

> *Yes because they use our website to get to know who we are and the work that we do. Our website redesign was a huge project that will influence those who choose to support us.*

> *Yes, by saving us money on technical and other projects, we've been able to devote additional resources to developing our mobile offering*

> *Yes - the projects we've had so far will allow us to enhance our work and programs which ultimately benefits the people we serve.*

> *Absolutely. We are creating a knowledge base for future volunteers to be able to use. The volunteer work generally centers around our donation pages which directly impacts our ability to raise funds.*

> *Yes! We are a very grassroots organization, and our consultation with you has really helped us become more professional, work on board development, and work on board governance.*

One mentioned plans for future work with Catchafire.

> *One of my goals this summer is to really use the platform to support recreating my business plan and working on an annual report.*

One reported no positive impact: "No work was completed. Total fail." (This answer is later clarified in their response to the next question, indicating low confidence that Catchafire volunteers have sufficient knowledge of nonprofits to be of assistance beyond well-defined technical skills or expertise.)

Majority of Respondents had Very Positive Experiences with Catchafire with Tangible Results

The majority of respondents described very positive experiences, citing Catchafire volunteers as being helpful and skillful, providing expertise the organization did not have in house. A couple mentioned their plans for future/ongoing work with them. These statements are their responses to the question:

How has your experience with Catchafire gone so far and what kind of impact has it had on your organization?

> *Overall [we] had had a positive experience with Catchafire, particularly on graphic design and data evaluation projects. We do not have these skills among our current staff team and so the support of volunteers allows us to work on projects that we would have limitations in completing.*

> *My experience with Catchafire has been truly amazing. I have been able to work with skilled volunteers from all over the country.*
>
> *I think the volunteers are exceptional and work well to support the clients.*
>
> *I've been able to pick the brains of various professionals who have more technical experience than me and knowledge about certain branding/marketing/usability aspects of my work. Working in a work from home capacity, it has also helped to collaborate with others who I would not have the chance to meet otherwise. Our website redesign project was helped tremendously by our access to volunteer designers.*
>
> *Catchafire has been super helpful in supporting our growth for almost three years. Most of our experiences have been positive. We appreciate the fact that they are so willing to help.*
>
> *As always Catchafire is instrumental in proving both a wide and deep marketplace of volunteer skills. The ability to switch between calls and longer projects increases our efficiency as well.*
>
> *I'm not a developer so it has been truly significant to be able to connect with talented developers on Catchafire. It was frightening when quarantine happened and we had to pivot to emergency fundraising efforts. Working with volunteer devs really saved us.*
>
> *We love Catchafire! Our next plan is to use you for website development, virtual fundraising, and a new logo.*

Some Experienced Catchafire as Better Suited for Specific Functional Areas

A couple of responses to the above question were more mixed, citing limitations on either Cachafire's part or on their own, but retaining a willingness to keep trying to work together for the desired benefit.

> *We were not able to use it much during COVID-19 as much of our programming was shut down. Now that we are returning to programming we expect to use it more.*
>
> *Unless it is a functional area like design or writing; not sure that the people really know or understand the needs of nonprofits. Now that we have specific design needs, we will give it another go.*

Enabled BLOs to Complete Additional Work

Access to Catchafire volunteers enabled BLOs (n=12 from survey) to overcome barriers to completing more work. All said it filled a gap in lack of staff. Many also said it addressed unmet needs in terms of skills as well as limited funds and time.

- **12 (100%)** Lack of staff
- **10 (83%)** Lack of in-house skills
- **9 (75%)** Funding constraints
- **8 (67%)** Time constraints

**Enabled BLOs to Complete Additional Work (n=12)**
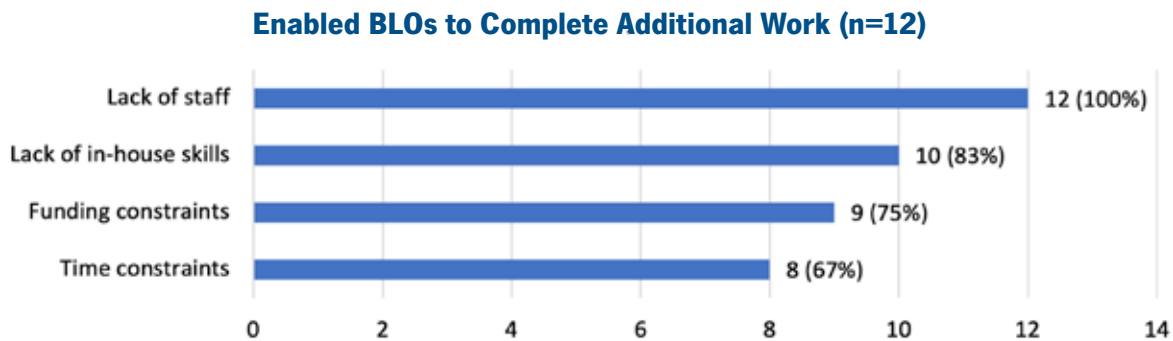
II. Non-Users

This section describes the barriers or other reasons the BLO Network member organizations did not work with Catchafire.

Barriers to Engagement (n=5)

Over half said they were deterred by not being sure how to use the Catchafire platform, which is a barrier that could be addressed through education. Similarly, one said they didn't understand what Catchafire offers. Two indicated that Catchafire could not match their areas of need.

- **3 (60%)** Not sure how to use the platform
- **1 (20%)** Not enough time and capacity
- **1 (20%)** Didn't understand what Catchafire is or does
- **1 (20%)** Catchafire's project offerings do not fit my needs
- **1 (20%)** Other: We could not find a Catchafire applicant to fill our need (though it was a listed project). We were trying to rewrite our bylaws.

Barriers to Engagement (n=5)

Barrier	Value
Not sure how to use the platform	3 (60%)
Not enough time and capacity	1 (20%)
Didn't understand what Catchafire is or does	1 (20%)
Catchafire's project offerings do not fit my needs	1 (20%)
Other: We could not find a Catchafire applicant to fill our need (though it was a listed project!). We were trying to rewrite our bylaws.	1 (20%)
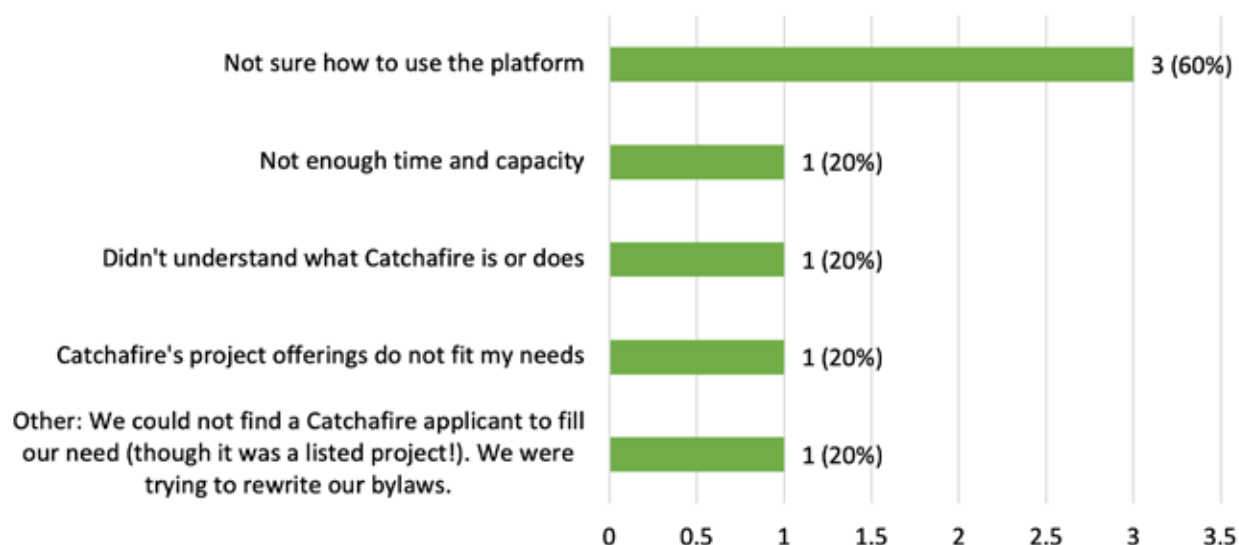
Asked to further describe any barriers, two cited simply not having enough time to avail themselves of Catchafire services. One mentioned a potential lack of follow-through in the process of enrolling. These statements are their responses to the question:

What sort of things could Catchafire or EBCF have done to help aid you in understanding whether Catchafire could be an impactful resource for you and your organization?

> *I really love what you're doing but cannot personally dedicate my time to developing. I've enlisted another team member to help but she hasn't tapped in yet. I hope we can lean in soon.*
>
> *I really do want to. I just am juggling so much trying to keep pace that I did not get a chance to stay on the site long enough to research and think about my needs.*
>
> *Looking forward to growing the organization.*
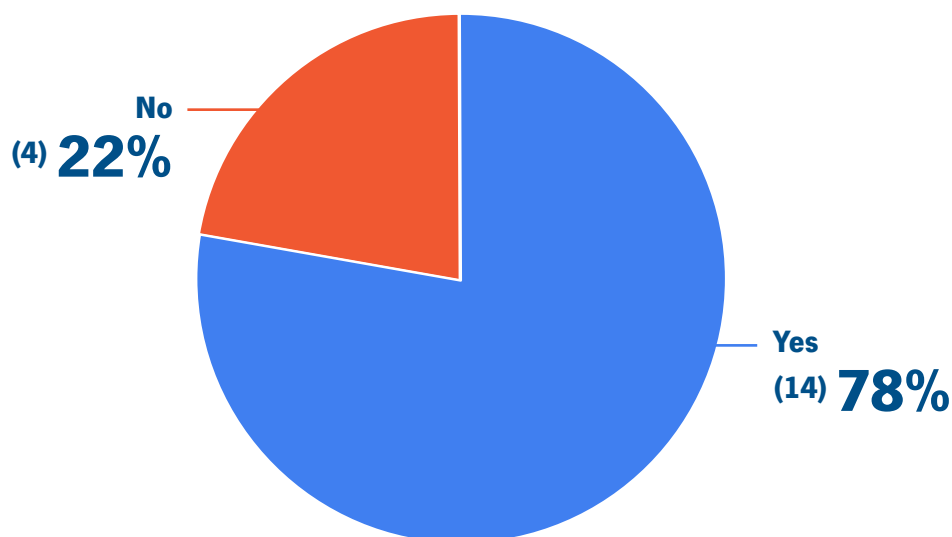>
> *We never received a one-hour conference call.*

III. COVID Context

This section summarizes respondents' plans to use, or not use, Catchafire to adapt to COVID.

Plan to use CAF to adapt to COVID-19 (n=18)

- **14 (78%)** Yes
- **4 (22%)** No

No
(4) 22%

Yes
(14) 78%

Over three-quarters said they planned to avail themselves of Catchafire COVID resources. The service of greatest interest is the one-on-one Consultation.

Which COVID resources do you plan to use? (n=14)

- **9 (64%)** 1:1 Consultation with Nonprofit Advisors
- **7 (50%)** Webinars on Timely Topics
- **7 (50%)** Catchafire's Needs Assessment Survey
- **3 (21%)** Projects for COVID-19 Support
- **3 (21%)** Virtual Nonprofit Community on Slack

Which COVID Resources Do You Plan to Use (n=14)

| Resource	Value
1:1 Consultation with Nonprofit Advisors	9 (64%)
Webinars on Timely Topics	7 (50%)
Catchafire's Needs Assessment Survey	7 (50%)
Projects for COVID-19 Support	3 (21%)
Virtual Nonprofit Community on Slack	3 (21%)
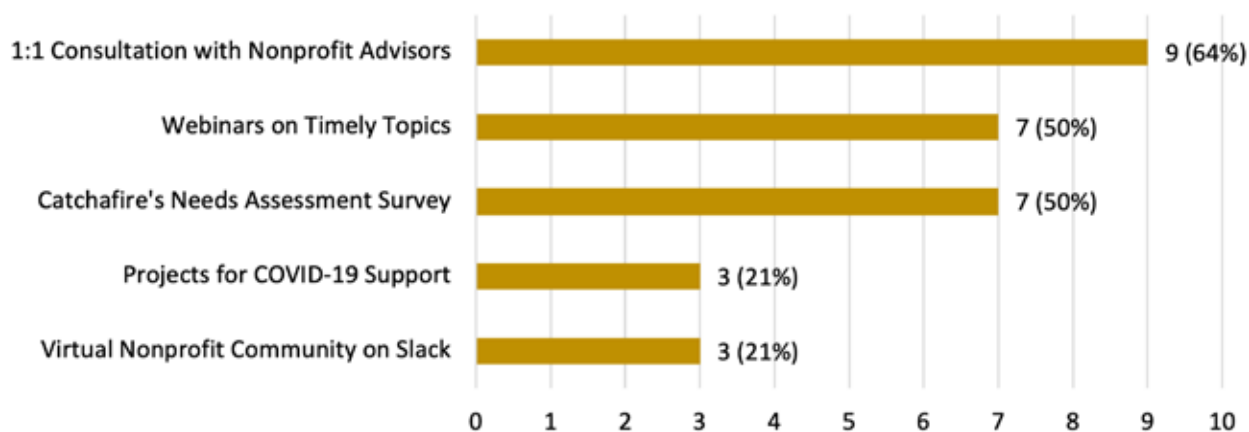
Of those who said they did not plan to use Catchafire for COVID needs, two said they didn't think their needs were a match, and two said they didn't think support would come quickly enough.

Barriers to Using Catchafire for COVID needs (n=4)

- **2 (50%)** Catchafire's project offerings do not fit my needs
- **2 (50%)** I don't think I'll get the support I need quickly enough
- **1 (25%)** Not enough time and capacity
- **1 (25%)** I don't have staff to dedicate to this
- **1 (25%)** Other: COVID-19 did not slow us down. It forced us to use online resources which has accelerated our growth.

Barriers to Using Catchafire for COVID needs (n=4)

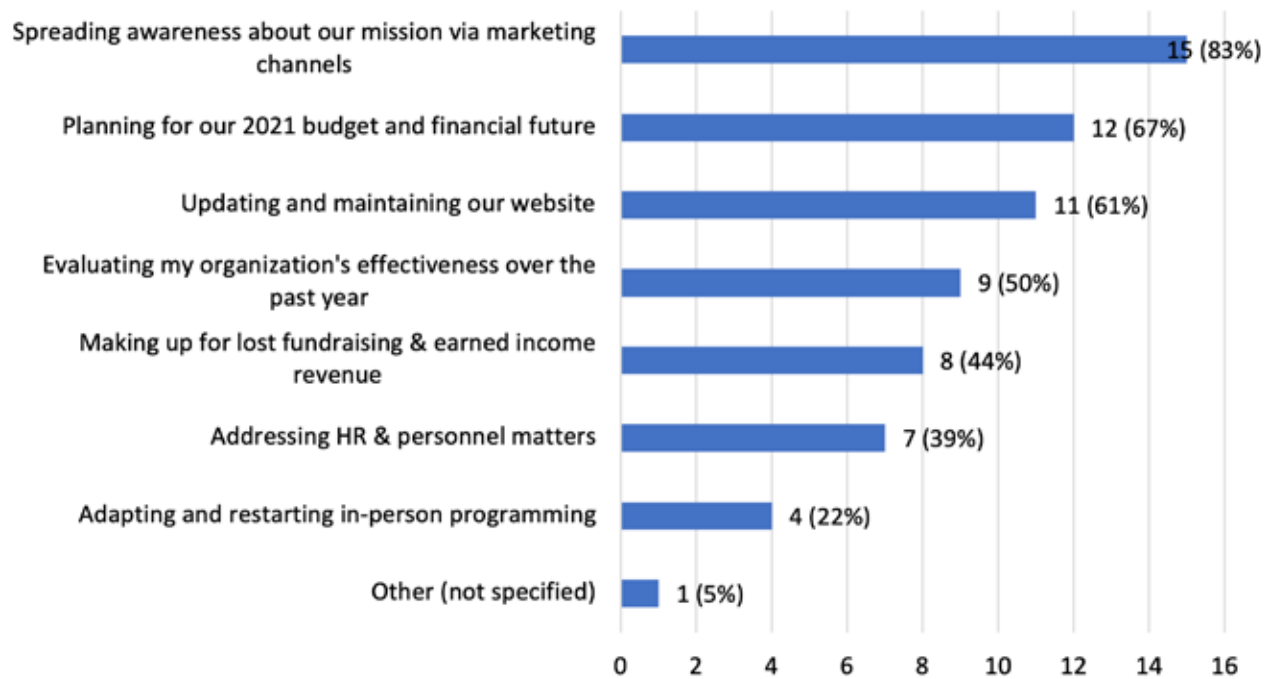|	
Catchafire's project offerings do not fit my needs	2 (50%)
I don't think I'll get the support I need quickly enough	2 (50%)
Not enough time and capacity	1 (25%)
I don't have staff to dedicate to this	1 (25%)
Other: COVID-19 did not slow us down. It forced us to use online resources which has accelerated our…	1 (25%)

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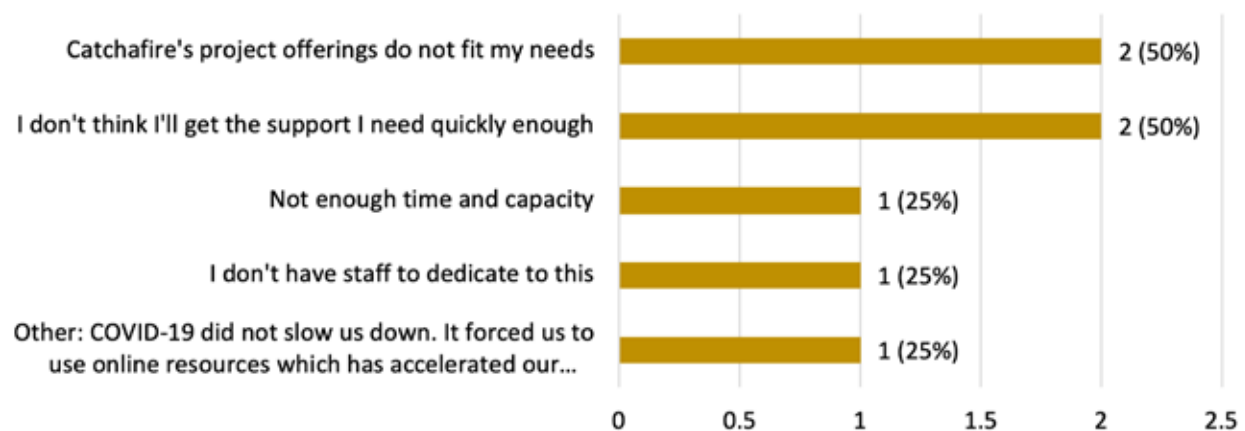
IV. Other Potential Uses and Interests

This section summarizes respondents' anticipated future needs, **including marketing, financial planning, and website development or maintenance.**

Challenges needing support in the next 12 months (n=18)

- **15 (83%)** Spreading awareness about our mission via marketing channels
- **12 (67%)** Planning for our 2021 budget and financial future
- **11 (61%)** Updating and maintaining our website,
- **9 (50%)** Evaluating my organization's effectiveness over the past year
- **8 (44%)** Making up for lost fundraising & earned income revenue
- **7 (39%)** Addressing HR & personnel matters
- **4 (22%)** Adapting and restarting in-person programming,
- **1 (5%)** Other (not specified)

Other Potential Uses and Interests (n=18)

Category	Value
Spreading awareness about our mission via marketing channels	15 (83%)
Planning for our 2021 budget and financial future	12 (67%)
Updating and maintaining our website	11 (61%)
Evaluating my organization's effectiveness over the past year	9 (50%)
Making up for lost fundraising & earned income revenue	8 (44%)
Addressing HR & personnel matters	7 (39%)
Adapting and restarting in-person programming	4 (22%)
Other (not specified)	1 (5%)

Conclusion

Catchafire volunteers offer BLOs a range of helpful capacities, as hinted at in responses to this user survey. Overall, respondents indicate that Catchafire provides important opportunities for BLOs to access professionals with skills or knowledge that internal teams don't have, and the ability to get specific projects done for free is experienced as a value add.

However, the dataset of BLO user experience is small (n=18), limiting our ability to assess usage and effectiveness that might have differed for small vs. large organizations, by cause area, by budget size, etc. and to therefore offer deeper insights as to whether or not this is an overall worthwhile investment for EBCF going forward at this time.

Since this is a mid-year reflection, we look forward to encouraging a larger survey response in 2023 as the efforts conclude.

Photos: *Catchafire website and social media*