



The Next-Best Action Playbook: Turning Donor Data Into Fundraising Decisions

How AI-driven recommendations transform donor
engagement from reactive campaigns to proactive strategy

squark.ai

Executive Summary

One of the clearest signals in the nonprofit sector today is that organizations want more than theory. They want workshops, templates, case studies, and artifacts they can use tomorrow. That is the right instinct, because the biggest failure mode in AI adoption is not lack of insight. It is lack of action.

Many fundraising teams already have access to more data than they can operationalize. They know who gave, who lapsed, which channels performed, and where broad patterns exist. What they often lack is a reliable mechanism for translating that information into the next decision that should be made for a specific donor, segment, or campaign.

That is where next-best action becomes essential.

Next-best action is not just a technical capability. It is an operating philosophy. It answers the question that matters most in real fundraising environments: given everything we know right now, what should we do next to maximize impact while respecting the donor relationship?

Why Insight Alone Is Not Enough

The nonprofit sector has spent years investing in reporting, CRM systems, campaign tools, and digital engagement platforms. Yet many teams still struggle with the final mile of decision-making.

A model score by itself is not enough. Neither is a dashboard. A fundraiser under deadline does not need a probability score alone. **They need direction:** send this appeal, pause this cadence, prioritize this donor, move this segment into phone outreach, suppress this list, test this channel, forecast this scenario.

When AI stops at insight, it creates another layer of interpretation work for already stretched teams. When AI provides next-best action, it becomes useful at the pace of fundraising.

The Four Layers of Next-Best Action

A strong next-best-action framework in fundraising has four parts.

1. Prioritize

It identifies which donors or segments matter most right now based on likelihood, value, timing, or risk.

2. Prescribe

It recommends what to do: message, channel, offer, cadence, ask, suppression, or escalation.

3. Orchestrate

It ensures those recommendations can move into actual workflows, across mail, email, social, SMS, major gifts, or reactivation efforts.

4. Learn

It measures what happened and uses those outcomes to improve the next cycle of

decisioning.

This is important because fundraising is not static. Donor behavior changes. Channel performance changes. Resource availability changes. Economic conditions change. A next-best-action model respects that reality by helping the organization move from one-time segmentation to **continuous decisioning**.

Why the Market Is Ready

The market is ready for this shift. Fundraising and grant writing remain priority use cases. Leadership involvement is rising. Hands-on demand is increasing. And the language of the field has moved from “we don’t know where to start” to “we need systems and governance so we can scale responsibly.”

Next-best action meets that moment. It gives leaders a practical frame for AI adoption that can be explained to staff, justified to boards, and tied to measurable outcomes.

It also aligns with a truth that many nonprofit teams already understand intuitively: the value of data is not in knowing more. It is in deciding better.

What This Means for Fundraising Teams

A next-best-action playbook can transform how teams work.

- **For annual giving:** It can prioritize which donors are most likely to renew, upgrade, or convert to sustainer status.
- **For acquisition:** It can identify which prospects deserve investment and which should be suppressed to reduce waste.
- **For reactivation:** It can recommend when to re-engage, what offer to use, and when to stop mailing chronic non-responders.
- **For leadership:** It can create a shared decision framework across departments so fundraising, communications, and operations are acting from the same intelligence.

The result is not just efficiency. It is coherence.

Where Squark Fits

Squark's Platform Alignment

Squark's product language maps cleanly onto this white paper thesis. It explicitly positions itself around plain-language "do-this-next" recommendations, next-best actions, donor-first orchestration across email, mail, social, and SMS, and AI agents that can trigger the next step without requiring technical teams to build custom workflows. Its platform also describes predictive scores for donor response, churn, upgrade, and channel selection, which makes the company's value proposition less about generic AI and more about actionable fundraising decisioning.

Conclusion

The future of fundraising AI will not belong to the tools that produce the most output. It will belong to the systems that help teams choose the next right action with speed, confidence, and accountability.

Next-best action is where AI becomes operational. And operational AI is what the nonprofit sector is now asking for.

About Squark AI (powered by Market Holdings)

Squark AI is an artificial intelligence platform purpose-built for nonprofit fundraising and data-driven decision-making. The platform connects directly to an organization's existing data systems and applies automated machine learning, predictive modeling, time-series forecasting, natural language processing, and generative AI to forecast donor behavior and recommend the next best actions to improve fundraising performance. Designed as a no-code environment for fundraising teams, Squark translates complex analytics into clear scores, forecasts, and recommendations that can be deployed across direct mail, digital, and multichannel campaigns. In addition to the core application, Squark provides an API that allows organizations and partners to embed its predictive intelligence directly into CRMs, marketing systems, and operational workflows. Over the past seven years, Squark AI has helped power fundraising strategies that have generated billions of dollars for some of the world's largest and most mission-critical nonprofit organizations.

About Market Holdings

Market Holdings is a global group of companies focused on fundraising, marketing, media, data solutions, and artificial intelligence for nonprofit and mission-driven organizations. Through its portfolio of agencies and technology platforms—including Innovairre and Squark AI—the company provides integrated services spanning strategy, analytics, creative communications, digital marketing, print production, and donor engagement technologies. Together, these organizations support hundreds of charities worldwide and help raise billions of dollars annually for causes such as healthcare, climate initiatives, hunger relief, and social services by combining data-driven marketing with advanced fundraising technology.

Squark|AI

www.squark.ai