What is a logo? What is a brand? And what is the difference?

A logo is the graphic symbol that represents a person, company or organization. Normally, most logos have a typographic part that more clearly spells out the name of the organization. However, If the logo is well-known enough you'll see it used without the name (fig. 1). A logo can also be purely typographic. It is called a logotype or wordmark when only the letters of the name make up to the logo. A great example is Coca-Cola's red scripty type (fig 2).

Sometimes the graphic symbol and typographic wordmark are very separate (see fig. 3 - Tune & Toler)). With other logo designs, there is not a clear separation of logo symbol from typography, (see fig. 4 - goDocs).

So if the symbol or typography is the logo, what is a brand?

Once a logo has been designed it gets applied to many different applications. These can be as simple as the logo placed in the top center of a piece of paper and calling it letterhead. But there is more to branding than where you put your logo.

It's important to use your logo consistently. But there should be a consistency to elements beyond your logo. These elements, that are part of a full brand identity, could be fonts, colors, imagery, and even the voice of the writing. All of these elements create a whole package and that whole package is your branding.

Your logo is a core identifier of an organization. But ultimately your brand is also how you define and promote yourself and how others define and view you.

How Can You Tell if Your Nonprofit Needs a New Logo

1. If your logo (or name) reflects something you no longer do, you need a new logo.
An example would be if you served a particular geographic region which is part of the logo and the organization has expanded or contracted. Another example would be if the name of your organization has changed.

2. If your logo was designed by an amateur you need a new logo.
Unless your nephew, or granddaughter or your next door neighbors teenager who likes to draw cartoon characters is really a closet graphic design prodigies … then you really should hire a professional. More than just a pretty picture, your organization's logo should be strong, powerful, polished and convey a positive message about the value of your mission. The man I used to work for used the slogan "The quality of your image should reflect to quality of your company." Fig 5. This was the first graphic design job I had. I was only 14 or 15 at the time. It's not really a logo but was used as the image of a company. As a teenager, I was elated to have something I drew or designed, that I was paid to produce, to be used by someone. However, as a professional designer, I look back and give a little cringe that something I drew or designed as a 14 year old was used by someone for their company.

3. If your logo looks too much like other nonprofits that do similar work as yours you need a new logo.
There might be an exception to this: If your brand (reputation) is stronger than other nonprofits whose logos look like yours.

However, you might think your organization stands out because it does to you. But does it stand out above all those other similar organizations, when viewed by an outsider (say, that prospective major donor considering all of the nonprofits in your category?) If not, you need a new logo.

4. If your logo is so intricate it doesn't send a clear signal you need a new logo.

Some designs just don't work. Maybe yours was complicated by a runaway board that had too much input If your logo says so much that it says nothing at all, you need a new one. Fig. 6. There is too much going on to the point that you really don't know what to focus on. You logo needs to say something about your organization but it's not meant to say absolutely everything about your organization. Your logo is a representation of you - it's not the whole book about you.

Now you've decided you need a new logo… what now?

Approval from your board

Contest for a logo design?…. You get what you pay for. If you don't pay anything, you may not have anything to work with.

Find a professional designer(s) and get a quote(s). Make sure you're clear on exactly what that price covers. If a design is taking a long time to create due to indecisiveness or a board complicating the process, make sure your design will let you know if it's getting to the point of going over budget. Make sure the logo is designed vector format.

You should sit down with the designer you hire and discuss your organization to help them understand it better. If you have ideas, pass those along.

Once the design process begins, what should you be looking for?

1 - Simplicity - sometimes less really is more. You need to think about whether it will work on a billboard as well as a business card. The more simple and the more clean the design, the more attractive and appealing it's going to be to the consumer or donor.

2 - Flexibility - Think about where your logo is going to be used. It should be adaptable on different mediums and situation such as
    Website
    Billboards
    Newsletters/Brochures
    Organization vehicles
    Letterheads
    T-Shirts or other clothing items
    Any other promotional items you can think of

3 - Specific -You need to understand that in a lot of cases, a logo is a 2 dimensional representation of an abstract concept. However, the elements should still be specific enough that they reflect the work you do.

4 - Memorable - No matter how beautiful and creative your logo is, it won't do much good if it doesn't make people remember your organization's goals and objectives? It also helps it to be more memorable if it is aesthetically pleasing. A great example of simplicity as well as memorable is fig 7 which is the logo for the World Wildlife Fund.

5- Will it work in 1-color? Your nonprofit isn't always going to want to or be able to pay for 4-color printing on every. So you need to make sure your logo looks good in one color or black & white. And this can mean using different shades and tones of the same color. If your logo is too complicated or has too many elements, it may be difficult to reproduce in one color.