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Consents in Raiser's Edge: Considerations and Shortcomings

Consents is a feature in The Raiser's Edge 7 and NXT that was designed for clients in the EU to help them be compliant with GDPR. It is intended to work together with Solicit Codes and acts as a place to store a history of when consent was obtained and what it was for. You do not have to be bound by the GDPR to use it. I encourage all organizations to utilize it to enhance data protection practices and recording of constituent preferences, and achieve compliance with any privacy law that affects your organization. There is extensive guidance from Blackbaud on the Consents feature. This document looks at specifically at pros and cons of using it.

Considerations

Learn and plan before you build

It's easy to launch into setting up Consents without planning or understanding how it is intended to be used. However a lot of consideration is needed as to how you can best reflect constituent preferences, how you can make processes user-friendly for staff and how you can fulfill your legal obligations. Think long term and as wide a picture as necessary. Read the Blackbaud guidance to grasp what Consents are for and how they were designed to be used.

With no one-size-fits-all solution you will need to determine the best setup to suit your organization and constituents. Some organizations used broad Solicit Codes with associated Consents and simple mapping, ie. "Do Not Mail", "Do Not Email". Others that offer constituents more specific preferences (always a good idea, in my opinion) reflect this in Consent mapping. Their Solicit Codes are as granular as needed and they might make use of Attributes as well. ie. No Annual Report, One Appeal a Year, Thanks Only, Mail Consent–Appeals, Mail Consent–Thanks, Mail Consent–ALL, Email Consent–Appeals, Email Consent–Thanks, Email Consent–ALL, and so on.

Consents are *not* a filter

A common mistake is to assume that Consents can be used as a filter, or can be used *instead* of Solicit Codes. This is not what Consents are for. They fulfill a requirement under GDPR to store a *history of constituent preferences*. They are a repository of information, not a categorization tool. They are difficult to query on and cannot be exported (unless you're exporting from Query, which is rarely a good idea). Whilst frustrating from a database maintenance and cleanup perspective, this is deliberate: they are just a storage mechanism. You should use Solicit Codes and other filters when compiling mailing lists. **Do not** attempt to use Consents for this.

There is suggestion in Blackbaud's guidance (see "Consent Management changes in web view…consent now fully works on its own") that you could just use Consents and no Solicit Codes. I do *not* recommend doing this. As noted above, Consents are difficult to query on, let alone export (the new bells and whistles of web view query notwithstanding). Filtering needs to be built out in all output types before Consents alone can be relied on to produce accurate lists).

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Shortcomings

Consent Source is not a required field

Under GDPR, the source of a consent is just as important as when and how it was made. The Consent Source field provides an editable lookup table to store this. However, Consent Source is not a required field and cannot be made to be required (none of the Consent fields are exposed in Config). Instead, you have to rely on users to remember to complete it. If they enter a Consent without a Source, they cannot edit that Consent. Instead they have to create another one then have someone with Supervisor rights delete the erroneous Consent. It is logical that only super-users can delete Consents but until Source can be made a required field this clumsy problem will continue (8 years so far and counting).

If you use any apps that push information to Raiser's Edge–such as a sync to an email platform–find out if that sync can include Consent Source. If it does not you will need to ensure the username the app uses to push information is intuitive so you can use this to determine where a Consent came from. For example, if you use NXT email and a constituent unsubscribes from email a Consent is automatically added to the record with no Consent Source but the username "NXT System User (Email)". While not ideal, this username is enough to infer where the consent came from.

Solicit Code dates are half baked

In web view when you add a Solicit Code you can apply a date. This is a great idea and a step forward but as these dates are not in database view this can cause confusion. Having no time or user stamp on Solicit Codes can cause difficulty when trying to understand a record's history, especially when something goes wrong. For example, when a record shows a repeat opt-out request, has the record not been updated or is something wrong with mailing list criteria? If a Consent was added each time the opt-out was made that will provide some clue, but Solicit Code can be edited independently of Consents. You could look at the Solicit Code in web view to see if a date was added. Having to check in several places is a burden that database managers could do without.

Consent Channels cannot be inactivated

The table for Consent Channel is hard coded so you cannot hide any values your organization does not use (those values are explained here). So long as your users know which ones to use this works fine however it is too easy for them to select the "ALL" option. This was designed to be a timesaver, automatically adding all applicable Solicit Codes rather than users having to add a Consent for each channel. However, an unintended consequence is that this option adds consents to the record for *all* combinations that have a Solicit Code mapped. So if you've diligently set up many mappings for different scenarios, all of these will be added to the record (ie. Email-Newsletters, Email-Appeals, Email-Invitations etc). What it should do is just add one consent for each Channel. The workaround is to map Solicit Codes for each Channel with the "ALL" category only and ensure other mappings have no Solicit Codes selected (instead they are entered manually after saving the Consent). See separate resource *AD Consents in RE – Sample setup* for an example of this.

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NXT email opt-outs only do half the job

If you use NXT email and a recipient unsubscribes, this comes through to the record as a global email opt-out. A Consent is automatically added and the email address is marked DNC. If you have set up a consent mapping for NXT email (see "Set consent rules for Email" here) the Solicit Codes will also be updated. However, Consent Source is not added and the "Requests no email" box is not checked. Depending on how you track emails you may also need to update Appeal response. Although NXT email feeds through nicely to database view (it is easy to create static queries of email responses, for example) it's a pain that there's still additional steps you have to complete to keep your records updated.

As noted above, the lack of a Consent Source is a shortcoming that cannot be resolved with a workaround, but you can infer from the username "NXT System User (Email)" where the opt-out came from.

NXT email opt-outs are all or nothing

There is currently no granularity in NXT Email so if you use it for various topics and the recipient wishes to opt out of *one* of these, there is no function to reflect that. Once opted out, even if by mistake, the recipient has to opt themselves in again or you have to submit a request (in the Email options cog). The workaround is to make sure your emails contain a link to a preferences webpage. That page on your website should host a secure form for gathering preferences (email topics, frequency) which you regularly retrieve and update manually or via an import.

Compare this to NetCommunity which has much better (and industry standard) options for recipient preferences and opt-outs. If you currently use BBNC or another email platform and are considering moving to NXT email, carefully examine first whether this all-or-nothing issue is going to be a major problem for you.

Blackbaud's guidance (read "Tip" box under "Opt-out link") has been hinting for at least 3 years that future feature updates will enable email recipients to manage their interests but it's anyone's guess when this will happen.

As of July 2025 Blackbaud's developers were working on the idea of using Consent Category as a preference mechanism for email opt-outs and they are looking for early adopters to work with on this. Email campaigns would be tagged with a category. Once sent, an unsubscribe would opt-out the record just for that category. It was hoped this would be rolled out sometime in 2026. There is currently no timeline for a full email preferences tool (maybe it'll be added to the donor Portal?), meaning NXT Email will continue to lag behind other industry email tools for some time to come.

In the May 2026 NXT Product Update Briefings I asked about a timeline for email preferences and granular unsubscribes. I also asked what developers were doing to help UK clients with the new "soft opt-in" email marketing legislation. I received the following responses:

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- Email preferences/granular unsubscribes: it's on the to do list for NXT. No timeline. They know they need to look at it.
- Soft opt-in: this was new to them and they acknowledged they needed to work on it.

As and when I become aware of any news in this area I will update this document.

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