"Be Your Donor" Day Checklist

Put yourself in your donor's shoes to guarantee that your fundraising strategy will inspire them to give more!

Website: Visit your nonprofit home page

- ☐ Can you easily find your contact information?
- ☐ What happens when you reach out to your nonprofit via phone, email, contact form?
- ☐ Is it easy to find the donate button on your home page?
- ☐ What does your website look like on a mobile device?

Email: Sign up for your nonprofit's email list or newsletter

- ☐ Is it easy to join your email list?
- ☐ Are the benefits to signing up clear?
- ☐ What happens once you submit your email address?
- ☐ Do you get a welcome message sent to your inbox?
- ☐ How do your emails look on a mobile device?

Making a donation: Make an online donation to your nonprofit

- ☐ When you click "donate," do you go directly to a donation form?
- ☐ How many clicks does it take to get to the actual form for making a gift?
- ☐ How long does it take to complete the donation? How many fields are required?
- ☐ What happens once you submit a donation?
- ☐ How long does it take for you to get a receipt?
- ☐ How long does it take for you to get a thank you note?
- ☐ How often do you hear about the difference you made?
- ☐ Can you easily make a donation on a mobile device?

How to Create an Effective Nonprofit Website

Why Your Website is Important

Your mother may not have been a web developer, but when she said, "You only have one chance to make a great first impression," she knew what she was talking about. Your website is your calling card, the way many of your donors will first "meet" you, so make it count! Your website should represent your organization, your cause, and your stakeholders.

Your website is also a:

- Tool to inspire your visitors to take action! It should not only provide information, but opportunities for supporters to get involved.
- The official source, the final destination, the grand kahuna of all news and everything there is to know about you!

Your nonprofit website should:

- Set you apart from other organizations in your sector.
- Help you clearly communicate with volunteers, donors, and staff members.
- Lead to greater understanding of your mission and how you're achieving it.

In this guide, you'll learn how to make your nonprofit website more effective and how it can raise more money for your cause!

Make Your Website a Destination

The two main challenges nonprofits face in online fundraising are (1) getting prospective donors to your website and (2) getting them excited about what you do. If you've achieved the first part, you're halfway there! Remember these three principles to make your website a donor destination:

1. Be authentic.

Don't come across as too "institutional." Show supporters that your organization is made up of real, hardworking people who are trying to accomplish important goals.

Identify your organization and provide contact information on every page of your website. This will lend a comforting aura of credibility to your page.

People skim websites, so think of web copy as a billboard advertisement. Users should be able to identify what your organization stands for in 4 seconds without reading paragraphs of text.

2. Show your passion.

Most giving decisions are emotionally based. Use large, inspiring imagery on your home page.

Give thanks to recent donors and share their stories. Seeing examples of past donors can inspire prospective donors to give.

3. Experiment to find what works.

No two organizations are exactly the same, nor do they have the exact same target audiences. Keep in mind, though, that there are generally two audiences: people who came to your website to make a donation and people who have heard of your organization and want to find out more. Your website should impress both of these groups.

Do simple user testing while creating and updating your website.

Key Components for a Great Nonprofit Website

People have short attention spans online, so your website needs to provide a visitor with easy access to everything in just three clicks. Your nonprofit website needs to grab your reader's attention, provide information, and spur that person to action. Here are 10 must-haves for your nonprofit website:

1. **A guessable web address.**

   Your web address should be one that users would think of when trying to find your organization online, such as "www.networkforgood.org" for Network for Good and "gardensforhealth.org" for Gardens for Health International.

2. **Information about your organization.**

   Why is your organization the nonprofit to support? What are you doing that's different from others? What's special about your volunteers, constituents, programs, and events?

3. **News on what you're doing.**

   Create a place to share a glimpse of your latest news and examples of your most recent content such as interesting articles, upcoming events, and social media posts.

4. Clear, intuitive navigation

Your website should be organized according to the expectations of the people who come to your website. Website visitors are looking for more information about what you do, how they can get involved, and why they should care.

Side by Side Kids' website has clear navigation that immediately tells visitors what they can expect to find. Credit: Side by Side Kids

5. Ease of use.

Take a moment to pause and reflect on your website's usability. See our chapter on testing and improvement to be sure your site is as easy to navigate as you think it is.

6. A big donate button.

Don't be afraid to ask for donations on your website. Isn't that the whole point of online fundraising? Supporters will appreciate an easy donation flow, so make that button shine!

7. Icons for social media.

Social media is a key way to connect and communicate with supporters. Be sure that all those hours tweeting and blogging don't go to waste: Provide links to your social media profiles and make it easy for supporters to grab content.

8. Images and multimedia.

Pictures of people who benefitted from your services or volunteers in action can demonstrate your mission, illustrate the impact of your work, and complement your website's text.


Garden for Health International's website features a picture of a woman who is benefitting from their work, visually demonstrating the overlaying text.
Credit: Gardens for Health International

9. A third-party endorsement.

Include ratings from GuideStar and Charity Navigator or a testimonial from a volunteer or beneficiary. A lot of the effectiveness of the messages on your website depends on the messenger. Let others help build your case.
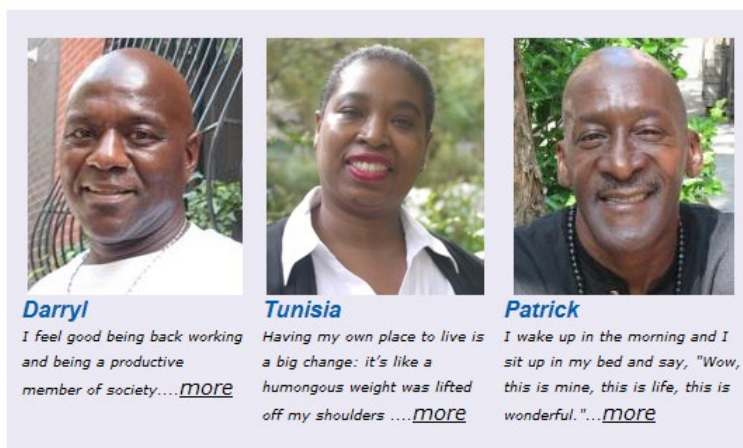
Project Renewal humanizes their organization with three excellent photographs of people they've helped and their stories.
Credit: Project Renewal

Darryl
I feel good being back working and being a productive member of society....more

Tunisia
Having my own place to live is a big change: it's like a humongous weight was lifted off my shoulders ....more

Patrick
I wake up in the morning and I sit up in my bed and say, "Wow, this is mine, this is life, this is wonderful."...more

10. An amazing, personalized home page.

Read on to learn why your organization's home page is so important!

Nonprofit Home Page Tips

Think of your home page as your organization's front yard: It needs curb appeal to entice your visitors to come in. It's a crucial part of establishing yourself and should show visitors that your organization can meet their needs. Don't let it be simply an "About Us" page, but let it speak to your values, interests, and desires.

If a home page is so important, why is it last on our list of a great website's key components? Because many of those components are also needed for a home page that pulls readers in and prompts them to take action. Every nonprofit home page needs:

- A large, colorful **donate button that links directly to your donation page.**
- A place where people can sign up for your **email newsletter.**

Malaria No More combines a short tagline in an easy-to-read font with a call-to-action button in a contrasting color to entice visitors to provide their email address and zip code. Credit: Malaria No More

- A one-sentence **tagline** on your home page that clearly explains what you do and what makes you unique with a **separate "About Us"** page.
- A **site search option** in the upper right hand corner with a search box that's 27 characters wide on every page. Don't offer a link to "search" that takes users to a new page for their initial search unless it's for an advanced search with multiple options.
- **Links** that quickly show readers what actions they can take. Make it easy for them to find the answers to their questions.

- Strategic use of **keywords** to make your site more attractive to search engines.

- A **striking image** (not a stock photo) that echoes your tagline and provides an emotional connection to your cause.

Wildlife SOS has an image rotator that shows one compelling image for each of their current initiative Credit: Wildlife SOS

- **Simplicity and clarity in design.** Your home page should be attractive and engaging, but uncluttered. Clutter can feel overwhelming and discourage visitors from taking action.

Now that you know what to include on your home page, be sure to arrange everything in a hierarchical manner that mimics an "F." Eye-tracking research by Dr. Jakob Nielsen shows that people don't read on the Web, they scan in an "F" shape until something catches their eye. Think about that pattern when placing your most important information.
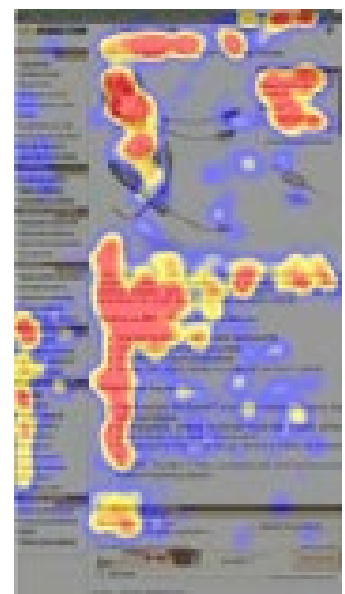
Branding Your Website

"There are approximately 1.5 million nonprofits in the United States. And a lot of their websites look like they were created from the same cookie cutter. Our advice? Be a different kind of cookie" —Nonprofit Hub

Since your website is where most people searching for your cause will first encounter your nonprofit's brand, make sure you're thoughtful about how you depict yourself online.

- Put your **logo** at the top of your home page and on every page on your site. (Users will expect it to link back to your home page.)

- Use **consistent colors and fonts** for your logo, home page, and other communication materials. Using consistent visuals throughout your digital and print materials will establish unity and tell your visitor that she's still on your site.
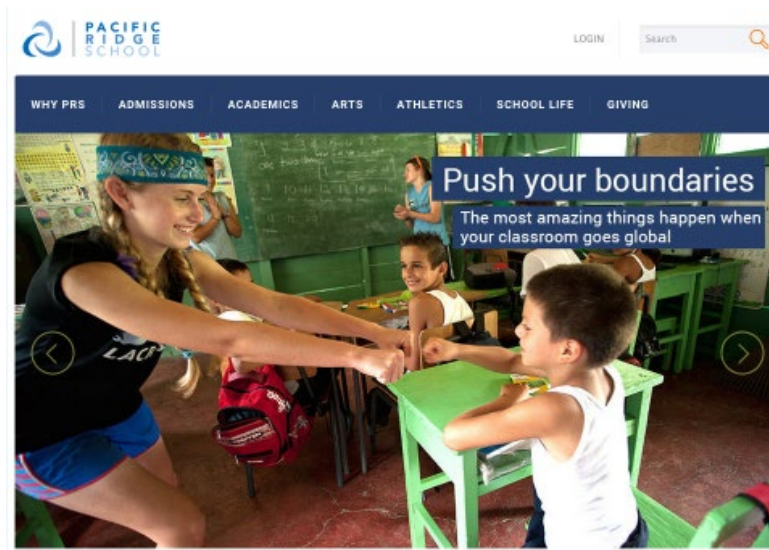
Pacific Ridge School uses a color palette of blue, gray, orange, and white to create unity across its website. Credit: Pacific Ridge School

- Make your website **match your voice**. Is your nonprofit serious, funny, traditional, or experimental? Write a statement that defines your brand's personality and refer to it when choosing what to post online. Are you consistently representing yourself to your audience?

- Many nonprofits are outposts of a larger outfit. When creating your individual group's website, make sure it's **consistent with the mother ship.** It's likely that your parent organization has a positive reputation and consistent branding—so take advantage of that. You'll build credibility if visitors are able to make the connection between your nonprofit and the national organization.

- Think about how **images and multimedia** can tell your story and create buy-in with your website's visitors. Just like including your contact information, images help humanize your organization. Putting a face on your work will provide an emotional appeal.

- Use **calls to action** to encourage your supporters to donate and participate on your site. Make all calls to action and donation buttons urgent, prominent, clear, and impossible to miss.

The home page of Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland, features clear calls to action, "give: donate now," "learn: learn more," and "take action: volunteer now." Credit: Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland

SEO: How to Have a Search Engine Friendly Site

Imagine someone looking online for volunteer opportunities or services you provide. Would they find your organization? Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines via "natural" (aka organic) search results. Here are some tips to make your nonprofit website more search engine friendly:

1. **Keyword research is the first step for Search Engine Optimization (SEO).**

   Take the time to figure out which words are used by the people you want to find you, and then use those words on the relevant pages of your site. For example, if a relevant and popular search phrase for your cause is "food banks in Georgia," make sure you use those keywords in the first few words of your page title, page keywords, and in your page content. Remember: Don't just stuff the keywords in there; it still needs to make sense!

2. **Make navigation easy.**

   Build clear text links to all parts of your site. Search engines can't follow image links or links embedded in animations like Flash, they like their navigation plain and simple—and so do many users.

3. **Get links from trusted, relevant sources.**

   Links are like a vote for your page and you can't rank well without them. Links must be relevant to the content matter of your site and they must be from high-quality websites. Use keywords in the links you have coming into your site. For example, "See our adoptable puppies in Houston" is a much better incoming link than "View our pets."

4. Build a sitemap to help search engines discover every page on your site.

Sitemaps list the pages in your site along with brief, keyword-rich descriptions of the page. If you have too many pages on your site, create as many sitemaps as you need and make sure they're linked together.

5. Track your progress with web analytics.

Most likely your web hosting service or content management system already has reports and tracking included. In addition to this, Google Analytics is easy to use and provides a wealth of information for free. Web analytics tell you how people interact with your site and where traffic is coming from. You can track the progress of any changes that you make to see if they are working.

6. Tell the search engines where you are by submitting your site details.

You can use Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools to submit a list of all the pages in your site. If you verify your site with Google and Bing you'll also find valuable information about how well and how often your site is being examined by search engines.

7. Content is King.

Create content that is interesting to your users, such as updates on what your organization is doing or relevant how-tos, and keep it up to date. Search engines love sites like blogs, which are regularly refreshed. At the end of the day, even a site that ranks well and gets lots of visitors is no good if visitors don't like what they see.

Common Nonprofit Website Mistakes

You've thought out your home page, you've created links and buttons, but your website's visitors aren't spending much time on your site. Why is that? Banishing these small-but-easy-to-fix problems can make a big difference:

Too much text: Think in terms of headings, bullets, lists, and images. Make each word count and be ruthless when deciding to add more text.

No emotional draw: Put a compelling image of your work front and center. Displaying vivacious imagery can enchant visitors and encourage emotions in a stronger way than text.

Small, aimless donate button: Make your button big, bold, and above the fold. Busy is bad: Keep it uncluttered and easy to read. Clarity and simplicity are huge, so this point bears repeating.

No focus: Have one clear focal point and one call to action for each page, otherwise the visitor and their eyes won't know what to focus on.

No social sharing: Include links to your social media profiles to make it easy for website visitors to connect with you on other platforms.

No blog or embed features: If you have a blog, feature it on your website. Include sharing functions so others can embed your content on their site to drive traffic back to you.

Unintuitive navigation: Don't divide your site by your departments because your visitors don't know them. Instead, think about what your user needs.

Lack of an email sign-up: Don't miss out on the opportunity to make regular and meaningful contact with people who show an interest in what you do. Collect visitors' email addresses and provide them with interesting content in return.

Difficult search: Make sure to test your search function. Is it easy for users to find what they're looking for? Tools such as Google Analytics will help you determine if visitors are quickly reaching their desired destinations.

No contact: Including phone numbers and addresses is the single best way to build trust with visitors. Put an easy way to contact you on every page.

Make Your Website a Donation Machine

Don't let a lack of digital effort deter would-be supporters. According to research by Google, 75% of donors start their charity research online versus offline. Focus on your donors' expectations and what you can do to meet them.

1. Make your donate button easier to find.

If you want to make donating to your cause simple, make sure finding your donation button is effortless. If it takes a visitor more than 2 seconds to find your button, then you need to make it more prominent. Your call to donate should be eye-catching: bold, colorful, and well positioned.

Thirst Relief's donation button stands out with a contrasting color.
Credit: Thirst Relief International

2. Frame the donate button in a more compelling way.

Now think about why someone should click on your Donate button. Your financial needs are not enough. What tangible change will result if they give? Will it feel good to make the donation? Is clicking on the button fun, touching, or compelling?

International Child Care's donation button is emotionally compelling with an image of a child. Credit: International Child Care

3. Add a sense of immediacy.

Your supporters might think you have a cool website and that they'll give later, never to return. You want to inspire someone to give right now, but how? Create a sense of urgency to donate through a campaign with a goal, deadline, matching grant, or an appeal for specific, tangible items or programs.

Malaria No More creates urgency with a countdown clock and a way to stop the countdown with a donation. Credit: Malaria No More

4. Provide information on where donations go.

Be sure to share information or links to information about where donations go. Transparency is the key to building trust with your supporters: Consider sharing what percentage of donations goes directly to mission-related activities and making a connection between donations and services provided.

Vive Peru's DonateNow page tells donors exactly what their donation can do. Credit: Vive Peru

5. Recognize that getting clicks requires cultivation.

While you want someone to donate right away, it's important to remember that it takes time to cultivate donors. Be sure your website includes a way to capture the email addresses of visitors so that you can build a relationship with them and turn them into donors in the future.

Community Food Band of Eastern Oklahoma has an easy, visually appealing way to capture supporter information and encourage visitors to visit their social media sites. Credit: Community Food Band of Eastern Oklahoma

Testing and Improvement

If you were a first-time visitor to your website, would you understand the mission of your organization? One of the easiest and most overlooked ways to improve your website and your donation process is by putting it through some basic testing. People hear "testing" and often get scared off, but all you need is somebody who isn't already familiar with your website. Ask a couple of volunteers, donors, and others in your target audience to perform the following three tests, all of which will give you great insight.

1. The Friend Test

Ask three friends who don't know much about your website to view it. Watch how quickly it takes for them to figure out what your home page is for, what the major sections are, how to navigate them, and how to return to your home page.

2. Hypothetical Information Test

Give your test subjects a hypothetical situation that requires them to find information: They've heard of your nonprofit and would like to make a donation, but first they need to research and be certain that you're credible. Have them talk you through the process as they try to determine if you should receive their donation. Determine how easy your information was to find, what information is missing, what they like, what they don't like, what catches their eye, and what does not meet expectations.

3. Task Testing

This type of test evaluates one specific task, in this case, donating to your cause. Now that your testers have proven that your organization is legitimate, have them try to make a donation and talk about what they are doing, where they are navigating to, what is difficult or confusing, and what they are clicking and why. Look for parts of the process that are confusing or difficult for them, as these may be points at which potential donors leave your website.

Going Mobile

With so much web traffic now coming from mobile phones, it's important that your website is easy to use no matter how it's being viewed. Luckily, you don't need a special site or a custom app to improve a visitor's experience. With a few simple design tweaks, you can make your site more usable—and improve your conversion rates by removing unnecessary distractions from all platforms.

1. **Make it snappy.**

   Keep your website's page load times under 5 seconds—less than 3 seconds is even better. Remove anything that makes your pages stall or fail to load.

2. **Minimize data entry.**

   It's already a best practice on a desktop to minimize the amount of typing your visitors do (they'll be more likely to fill out your form), and it's absolutely critical for mobile users. Typing a lot is a drag on even the smartest of phones.

3. **Your copy must be short and sweet.**

   Online visitors don't read, they skim, so make sentences shorter, break up longer blocks of text with headings, and use an easy-to-read font.

4. **Focus on one high-quality image.**

   Images can quickly communicate, but you only need one high-quality photo rather than multiple images. More images will take longer to load and they won't look good on a small mobile screen.

5. **Remove the roadblocks.**

   Swap out Flash, popups, or other animations for best results because most mobile devices can't correctly display content in these formats.

6. **Keep relevant content front and center.**

   Don't force mobile users to scroll across three columns and all four corners of your site. Place key information top and center for easy access.

7. Make links and buttons easy to use.

Are your links and buttons large enough to click on from small screens without zooming in? Provide plenty of space between items.

8. Keep it simple.

A simple, clean design is good for any site. Embrace the use of white space and narrow your visitor's focus to one or two calls to action.

Remember

- Include a tagline about your organization, a place to collect email addresses, and a large donate button on your home page.
- Brand your website with your logo and a consistent color scheme, fonts, and voice.
- Make it easy for your donors to give with an easy to find donate button that goes straight to your donation page.
- Ensure your site is user friendly by performing simple tests and making improvements.
- Keep everything simple, clean, and uncluttered.

Learn More

How to Make the Case for Giving

Use these eight steps as a guide to help your organization craft a compelling case for giving. Packed with fundraising tips, this free guide will help you connect with donors and raise more money.

Download this free guide now.

Nonprofit Guide to Email Engagement

Do your donors only hear from you when you're asking for money? It's time to revamp your engagement strategy. Learn how to craft an amazing welcome series and continue to inspire your supporters through email.

Download this free guide now.
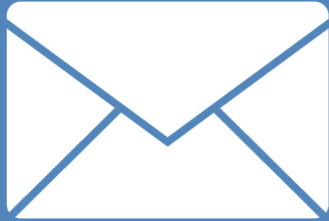
The Nonprofit Guide to Email Engagement

Introduction

Does this sound familiar?

After year-end giving season comes to a close and our thank you notes are sent, more often than not our donors don't hear much from us until we're ready to send another appeal.

We can do better for our supporters and our missions.

Think of what could happen if you spent more time communicating with your supporters and focused on building relationships with donors throughout the year. Would your retention rates improve? Would you get more recurring donors, volunteers, and word of mouth referrals for your cause? Before you dive headlong into year-end fundraising mode, take some time to reach out to your donors and start a conversation with them about their impact so far and what more you can do together.

In this guide, we'll show you how to use email to build a relationship with your donors so they'll be more likely to give to your organization this year—and for years to come.

Every Great Relationship Starts with Hello

We all know how to say hello. It's a basic skill that kicks off all of our relationships. Don't skip this important step when beginning a new relationship with a supporter.

Remember: A hello is about creating an opportunity to get to know someone. It's about asking questions and understanding another point of view. Focus on the true spirit of saying hello without jumping right to "will you donate?"

What Makes a Great Welcome?

Branded email with your nonprofit's logo and name

A hearty welcome!

A compelling photo that illustrates your nonprofit's mission and personality

Sincere appreciation for the supporter's interest in the organization

What the audience should expect from future emails

Specific contact information

Signed by a real person

Another way to connect and find out more

A shining example of great hello from Sanctuary One.

Create a Great Welcome Series

Why a welcome series is important

After a constituent signs up to receive emails from your organization, you probably send them an automated email that acknowledges their submission and thanks them for their interest in your organization.

But what comes next? To ease new constituents into a closer relationship with your organization after sign-up and to lay out a welcome mat of sorts to your cause, consider introducing your organization through an email welcome series.

What it is

A welcome series is a sequence of two to three simple, personal email messages (a plus is if you can automate them!) that a constituent receives over the course of their first few weeks on your email list. It educates them about your organization, its programs, and ways to get involved and stay connected. If executed thoughtfully, a welcome series can help you give new constituent relationships the personal attention they need without a huge resource commitment (before asking for donations).

Plan Your Welcome Series

1 **Send a personal note from the voice of your organization.**
This could be your organization's executive director, a staff member who works in your development department, or a celebrity spokesperson. (Quick tip: Tread lightly with your spokesperson. Constituents want to talk to someone who relates to them on an ongoing basis, not just a talking head.) Your first email should highlight the state of your organization and educate new constituents about what your organization does and the people or community that you serve. Focus on educating your new constituents and set expectations about what they will receive and how often.

2 **Highlight specific ways your constituents can get involved.**
Do you have really great programs geared toward families? Are you looking for volunteers for your homeless ministry? Planning a gala dinner and recruiting committee members? In your second welcome message,emphasize educating newcomers on ways to get involved or highlight the value of being a supporter. Mentioning upcoming events will also give new constituents a chance to meet your staff in person and will likely increase their level of involvement with your organization.

3 **Provide other ways to engage with your organization.**
Tell them about how they can connect with your staff through Facebook or Twitter. (Need help with social media post ideas? Check out our eGuide 101 Social Media Posts.) Do you post compelling videos that are super sharable? Include a link to your YouTube channel.

Timing

Your first welcome message should come promptly after the triggering event such as a donation, a newsletter subscription, etc. That said, you know your audience best, so experiment with the number of days or even weeks that elapse between your messages. Some organizations find that sending one message every 2 weeks or 6 weeks is effective, while others prefer weekly messages.

Tracking

Monitor your organization's click-through and open rates and adjust your approach based on your results. Don't be afraid to change the frequency of your messages as well as your subject lines, content, and calls to action. We advocate testing different versions of each email to find what works best for your unique message and subscribers.

Mobile

As of June 2013, 44% of email opens are happening on mobile devices. This means you need to ensure that your email is easy to read on a smartphone and that you are pointing to mobile-friendly pages. An easy way to make your email more smartphone friendly is to keep it simple, short, and optimized for fingertip navigation. Can someone easily click on your link or button with their thumb? If not, rethink your email design. Your desktop readers will thank you, too.

Continue the Conversation

Email is one of the most effective ways to communicate with your donors. Don't waste this opportunity to be a positive presence in their inbox. By regularly reaching out with great content and strategic calls to action, you can build a stronger relationship with your supporters, turning them into loyal donors who give more over time.

Tell Your Story

Want to really connect with your supporters? Tell them a story! Research has shown that people are more likely to emotionally connect with and remember a story over other forms of information. Think about what you want to convey and build a story around it. Donors relate more to stories about specific people or animals than to statistics. Use your emails to paint a vivid picture that donors will remember when it's time to give.

10 Simple Ideas for Email Content

1. Give an update on a former client or crisis.
2. Write a review of a book or movie that's relevant to your cause.
3. Share a recent success story.
4. Recap your latest event.
5. Feature a story about one of your volunteers.
6. Ask for suggestions for your next newsletter.
7. Offer a preview of an upcoming fundraising event.
8. Share a testimonial from a beneficiary or supporter.
9. Enlist a staff member to describe their favorite moment at your organization.
10. Offer a special downloadable resource, such as a checklist or poster.

Keep the Conversation Going

You've said hello and made a great introduction to your supporters, but don't just coast until your next fundraising appeal. For more active and loyal donors, stay in touch and provide them with consistent opportunities to stay connected to your cause.

Stay in touch. Create a communication calendar and reach out to your supporters on a consistent and regular basis. They can't forge a great relationship with you if you're missing from their inbox!

Be a good listener. Your emailoutreach should not be a one-way message. Incorporate reader feedback, give supporters a chance to interact with your content, and feature ideas and stories from your audience.

Keep it interesting. Make your emails fun to receive—and read! Ditch the long- form reports and insider jargon in favor of compelling stories, featured photos and videos, and a variety of calls to action.

It's not all about you. Instead of talking about how great you are, focus on sharing amazing stories about your donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries.

Don't come on too strong. Are your emails all fundraising appeals, all the time? Balance your fundraising appeals with success stories, progress reports, and other opportunities for supporters to get involved.

Be yourself. People want to support other people, not a sterile, faceless organization. Have a personality and a point of view. Let your audience see how your nonprofit is unique and you'llleave a lasting impression.

Make Sure Your Email Is Read (and Enjoyed)

Now you know how to really engage your supporters through email, make sure your messages are getting delivered and opened. Follow these tips to help you personalize messages and refine your delivery strategy so that your emails are read (and enjoyed).

Customize the "From" field

There's nothing special or memorable about receiving an email from "office" or info@nonprofit.org. But when you personalize the "From" address to send your campaign from an actual person, such as your executive director or a beneficiary of your work, you've taken the first step in creating a relationship with your supporters.

Limit your subject line length.

The perfect subject line length is up for debate. The rule of thumb is a 40 character limit, but some email clients display only the first 25. When in doubt, test across as many email clients as you can, and take a look at your open rates as you test.

Perfect subject line copy.

You've got only one chance to make a good first impression. Your email subject lines can show how much you respect your constituents' busy schedules by telling them exactly what they'll find inside. Avoid using ALL CAPS, dollar signs, and exclamation points, all of which will raise flags for spam filters. To improve email delivery rates, use a spam filter test to check your email header, subject line, email body, and footer for anything that may cause your message to be marked as spam.

Make it personal.

Formal salutations like "Dear Sir or Madam" can be appropriate when writing long form letters by hand, but with email, the expectations are less formal. Feel free to address your recipients with a familiar "Hi," followed by their first name—provided of course that you have followed the email list building best practice of asking for first and last names.

Bring it to a close.

The same advice to keep your content personal applies when signing off. Your emails should be signed by a real person. Some organizations like to include a small photo of the sender to create an even more personal touch. The email's closing also provides you with the chance to add one more reminder using a post script (P.S.) to prompt reader action. This is often one of the most read elements in emails.

Remember

- Start by saying hello and sending a great welcome message.
- Connect with your fans by telling stories about your organization's work and its impact.
- Stay in touch with your supporters—don't let them hear from you only through fundraising appeals.
- Learn from your outreach by testing different subject lines and calls to action, as well as measuring how your emails perform.
- Refine your subject line, "from" information, and email structure to improve your delivery and open rates.
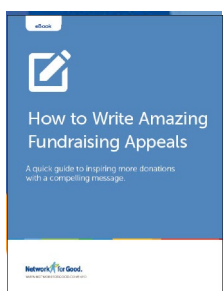
Learn More
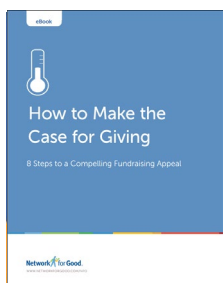
How to Make the Case for Giving

Use these eight steps as a guide to help your organization craft a compelling case for giving. Packed with fundraising tips, this free guide will help you connect with donors and raise more money.

Download this free guide now

How to Write Amazing Fundraising Appeals

To raise more money online, you need a great email appeal that grabs donors' attention and inspires them to give. Download this guide and learn how to write an effective email appeal that gets donors to give, give big, and give again.

Download this free guide now

The Ultimate Donation Page Guide

Learn how to create compelling donation pages that convert more donors and raise more money.

Network for Good.

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About the Author

Caryn Stein

Caryn Stein is Network for Good's fundraising training expert. She's helped thousands of nonprofits create online engagement strategies and optimize their fundraising campaigns. She's also the editor of The Nonprofit Marketing Blog.

The Ultimate Donation Page Guide

Your blueprint for building an online donation page that gets donors to give, give big, and give again.

In 2013, U.S. nonprofits raised more than $20 billion online. That's a pretty big pile of cash making a meaningful impact. The crazy thing is that most donors would gladly give more online if only nonprofits would make it easier for them to do so. By simply offering an easy way to give online, we estimate that the average nonprofit could raise thousands more each year.

Could your organization use more donations? We thought so.

If it's that easy, why aren't more nonprofits doing it? The reality is that most fundraisers aren't online giving experts or conversion optimization wizards. And they shouldn't have to be.

That's where this guide comes in. Whether you've had an online donation page for years or haven't yet taken the plunge, this guide will give you the tools you need to get better results online.

If you already have a DonateNow page, you can log in and follow along. Want to learn more about DonateNow? Get in touch with a member of our team to find out how we can help you raise more money online.

Still not convinced you need a well-designed donation page that's optimized for giving? Here are a few good reasons:

→ A user is likely to ignore your call to action if your donation page is confusing or looks unprofessional.

→ A great online donation experience builds trust with your constituents.

→ Getting potential donors to your donation page takes time and money. Don't lose them at the last second because of a poorly designed page!

→ Tracking and testing donation pages is easy to do.

→ Making small changes to a donation page can yield major results.

Ready? Let's get started.
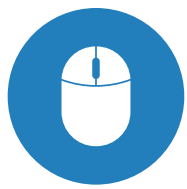
The Truth About Online Donation Pages

A well-designed donation page that's optimized for giving can make a big difference in your fundraising results.

Why You Need to Pay Attention to Your Donation Page

Imagine you're a donor who just received the world's best fundraising appeal. You have tears in your eyes and a fire in your heart. Credit card in hand, you click a link in the message to donate… and you're taken to a shopping cart or login page with very few instructions and no clear contact info if you have questions. You:

> a) Slog through and make a donation after several minutes of trial and error.
>
> b) Decide to write a check instead.
>
> c) Put your credit card away and think, "I'll come back to it later."

All but the most dedicated donors will choose option c. They want to support you but don't have the time, patience, or online savvy to figure out how. You're not making it easy—and online donations are supposed to be convenient.

The longer it takes someone to figure out and complete your donation process, the less likely they are to complete it.

The Secrets of Successful Donation Pages

All successful donation pages have a lot in common:

They make giving easy. This includes enabling supporters to interact quickly via mobile and social. Does your donation page offer donors easy ways to give and share on the go?

They keep donors in the moment of giving. Your donation page should echo your key fundraising messages, incorporate your branding, and match your campaign materials. It should be an extension of the conversation you're having across all of your outreach channels.

They start the donor relationship off right. Donor retention begins before the donation is made. If giving is confusing, difficult, or frustrating, your donor's experience with your nonprofit is starting on a negative note. Your donation page provider should also help you quickly thank donors with a powerful post-donation experience and email acknowledgement, plus give you the information you need to cultivate these supporters over time.

Take Inventory of Your Donation Page

Here's a quick list of musts for your online donation page. Your page should:

→ Be as short as possible: one page, and one page only.

→ Offer the minimum number of fields.

→ Look like your organization's other materials, such as your website.

→ Have one clear objective: Donate!

→ Have the minimum amount of text it takes to reinforce your case for giving.

→ Be easy to read.

→ Have well-positioned recurring gift options.

→ Provide a warm thank you/confirmation page after the donation is made.

We'll cover many of these throughout the guide. For now, think about everything that happens in your online fundraising campaigns and how your donation page feeds into the big picture.

✎ To-Do: Walk through making a contribution on your donation page. Note what's essential to completing (or increasing) the gift. Cut the rest.

Constructing a Proper Donation Page

A lot goes into creating effective donation pages, but that doesn't mean a lot should go *on* them!

How Clutter Steals Donations from Your Cause

All too often, nonprofits give people too many ways to leave their donation page without completing a gift, including:

Too many fields. Online usability experts generally agree that when a form includes a lot of fields, a visitor is less likely to complete it.

Too many links. Links or navigation elements that lead visitors away from your donation page increase the odds that a prospective donor will click away without completing it.

Too much text. Additional text on your page requires your donor to do more work and can trigger "fine print" skepticism.

Too many images. Photos on your donation page seem like a good idea but can confuse and distract donors, especially when the images don't communicate why a donation matters.

Too much complexity. More complex options on your page make potential donors less likely to complete your form.

Too many steps. The more pages there are to complete, the more likely a donor is to abandon the process.

When it takes us more time or effort to do something, we're less likely to do it at all. It's just human nature! In other words, all that extra "stuff" = work.

★ Tip: Before adding anything to your donation page, ask yourself, "Will this make it easier for donors to give?"

Don't Forget About Mobile

Even if your donation page automatically serves up a smartphone-friendly version, thinking "mobile first" forces you to create a simplified yet highly usable experience for your donors. This means no clutter, extra steps, or elements that aren't easily clickable with a thumb. This is important because:

→ 31% of all website traffic now comes from mobile. Source: *Walker Sands*

→ 51% of email opens now happen via mobile. Source: *Litmus*

→ 61% say they have a more favorable opinion of brands that offer a good mobile experience. Source: *Latitude*

How to Clean Up Your Donation Page

The trick to clearing away (or preventing) clutter from your donation page is to become a ruthless editor.

Page Layout

Don't be too clever with your layout or field order. Donors expect basic things to work a certain way. Disrupting this expected flow will confuse them and cause them to abandon ship.

Navigation

All landing pages perform best when they offer limited navigation. Give prospective donors a max of three options to find out more:
- → A link to your website's home page (or other donor-specific landing page) from your logo in the upper-left corner of your donation page.
- → A "Contact Us" link.
- → A link to a "Why Give?" page that explains where the money goes (and sends donors back to your donation page) or to online reviews about your organization.

Form Fields

Start with the fewest fields required to complete a donation. Resist the temptation to use your donation form as a survey—any information you might glean will be offset by smaller donations. Add a field only if:
- → It helps the donor complete their donation.
- → It can help you raise more money.
- → It provides information you can't get any other way.

Donation Page Copy

Keep it short and to the point. Limit yourself to one headline and two sentences that are just long enough to reiterate your ask and reinforce the sense of urgency. Cut everything else.

Images

Limit images to your logo, a security/trust seal from your donation processor, and quality photo that evokes emotion. If you use a photo, focus on one picture only—one quality photo will outperform multiple photos.

When in Doubt: Ask yourself, "What's more important? Adding more stuff to our page or getting more donations for our mission?"

What *Never* to Include on Your Donation Page

What goes on your donation page will vary by organization. That said, here are a few never-evers:
- → Anything that causes a donor to question your credibility or legitimacy.
- → Images that don't add to the emotional connection between the donor and your cause.
- → Anything that makes your donor stop and think about for more than two seconds.
- → Everything you have on your nonprofit website.

To sum it up: Keep it simple, and remember that less is more. More donations, that is.

The Secrets of Donation Page Design

Turns out, looks *do* matter—when it comes to donation pages, that is!

Why Donation Page Design Affects Fundraising Results

When donors hit your donation page, they shouldn't feel as if you've handed them off to a stranger to take their money. A donation page with your logo, branding, and style looks more professional and creates a warmer, more familiar experience.

But it doesn't stop there.

The way your page looks can affect the amount of money you raise.

Stats from Network for Good's Digital Giving Index consistently show that branded donation pages bring in 20% to 30% higher average gifts than their generic, unbranded cousins.

Bottom line: If your donation page feels like it has nothing to do with your cause, your donors may wonder if they landed in the right place.

GENERIC GIVING PAGE | BRANDED GIVING PAGE

20-30% smaller average gifts than on branded giving pages

$105 Avg gift size | 7% of overall giving

6x more dollars raised than on generic giving pages

$139 Avg gift size | 54% of overall giving

✎ To-Do: Click to your donation page from your email appeals or website. Are there elements of continuity, or is this transition jarring?

The Right Way to Brand Your Donation Page

For best results, your donation page should match:

→ Your organization's brand and design.

→ The look and feel of the campaign materials that brought your user to the page.

This reinforces your organization's identity and improves the donor experience.

Colors

Incorporate no more than two to three core brand colors to avoid visual overload. These should be the same colors that appear in your logo, website, and other marketing materials.

Design

If you have other design motifs that are key to your nonprofit's identity, find ways to include them *only* if they don't add to visual clutter.

Text

Choose fonts and text colors that complement your brand but err on the side of readability. Dark colors on light backgrounds work best. Avoid heavily stylized typefaces—aim for maximum utility instead of being too artistic. Use a font size that's easy to read for donors of all ages. Hard-to-read text sets off a red flag in your donor's mind—and makes it difficult to complete your form.

Images

Online visitors expect to see your logo in the upper left corner. It indicates that donors are in the right place and reminds them of other great experiences they may have had with your organization. In addition to your logo, one high-quality photo can help you connect with donors and reinforce your case for giving.

★ Tip : Think of what your nonprofit stands for and how supporters typically recognize your organization. Use these two things to guide your donation page design.

How to Choose the Right Image

Your donation page image should capture a donor's attention, reaffirm their decision to give, and communicate who will benefit from their gift. It literally puts a face on your work. A poorly chosen image can confuse donors or send the wrong message about your mission.

Here are some things to keep in mind when selecting your image:

Avoid

→ Generic-looking images

→ Images that are obviously stock photos

→ Cartoons, illustrations, or abstract symbols

→ Images of buildings

→ Inanimate objects

→ Images of crowds

→ Photos that are too small to have a visual impact

→ Busy images

Use

→ A single, focused image that reinforces an emotional connection with your cause

→ Close-up images of faces (animal or human)

→ Real photos of your work

→ Photos that focus on one or two individuals

→ Photos of individuals looking straight into the camera

→ Photos that help tell a story of what a donation can do

→ Photos that illustrate the need or the need being met

→ Images that illustrate the positive impact of your work

→ Images that are in focus and are the right resolution for Web use

★ Tip: Use the same photo on your website, appeals and advertisements, and donation page to tie the whole experience together.

Calls to Action That Get Results

Even the most persuasive fundraisers can't get people to act without one extremely important thing: A clear and powerful call to action. Without one, donors are unsure what they're supposed to do next.

Why Your Call to Action Matters

Every successful nonprofit fundraising campaign has an effective call to action. This is the actual spot where you ask somebody to do something—in this case, donate. You want to make it crystal clear what your donors should do next. Don't assume it's obvious. Your job as a fundraiser is to educate and guide your supporters to making a donation as quickly and easily as possible. Your call to action is a critical part of that.

When writing copy for your donation page, the headline should reinforce your call to action. Make it clear and concise. You need only remind donors what their donation will do and why it matters—and underscore a sense of urgency.

★ Tip: Use your main call to action as your donation page headline.

Craft an Effective Call to Action

What's the one thing you want your supporter to do when they land on your page? Donate! The words you use should all work together to move them toward completing their gift.

Ready to write your call to action? Keep these tips in mind:

Use clear terms to avoid confusion. Focus on verbs like "give" or "donate" instead of fuzzy words like "support." Use "join" only if you have a membership model.

Tie your call to action to the impact of a donation. What will happen if a donor makes a contribution? What will happen if they don't act?

Use deadlines and words like "now" and "today." This will remind donors of the importance of taking action immediately.

Once you've created your call to action, check that it meets these four critical criteria:

→ Is your call to action feasible and realistic?

→ Is it filmable? Can your donors visualize exactly what they are supposed to do? Don't be abstract.

→ Does it have a first priority? Will donors know what they need to do next?

→ Is it easy to do? Have you removed all of the barriers to action?

★ Tip: The most effective calls to action are easy for donors to picture themselves doing.

Optimizing the Rest of Your Copy

Beyond a strong headline and brief text reinforcing exactly why a donor should give immediately, don't pile a lot of words onto your donation page. Remember: Paragraphs slow your donors down and prompt them to wonder what you're hiding in all that "fine print."

→ Consider how your titles relate to the keywords supporters might use to search for your cause online.

→ Keep it short. This is so important that it bears repeating. Online, people don't read, they skim. Make your text easy to read and understand by using short sentences and simple, active language.

→ Think of new donors who land on your page. Will your writing make sense to them?

→ Include terms and phrases that match the message in your appeals, website, and other outreach.

→ Avoid jargon, acronyms, and insider terms. These will alienate or confuse potential supporters.

You've already done most of the hard work. Your donation page doesn't need a lot of words, but the words it does have should be chosen carefully for maximum impact.

Giving Options That Make a Difference

A great donation page can encourage people to give, but the right options—properly positioned—can encourage donors to give more.

Why You Need Recurring Giving

Simply put, not offering a recurring gift option means you're missing out on donations. It helps donors fit giving into their budgets and allows you to collect more over time. If donors feel like they can't give enough to make a difference, they may not give at all.

Make sure your donation form offers a recurring giving option. When reaching out to donors, remind them that they can sign up for monthly giving—and make it easy for them to do.

Make it a priority in your appeals. Recurring giving should stand out in your appeals, website, and (of course) donation form. It's a win-win situation: monthly donations for you, convenience and budgeting help for your donors.

Make recurring giving something special. Offer exclusive perks or a special status to monthly gift tiers to make recurring giving a more attractive option.

Make it tangible. Frame your recurring gift options in a way that lets donors know how their regular support will help. Tie monthly giving levels to real impact. If regular activities or outreach can be tied to donation frequency, make that connection. For example, some organizations have an ambassador program or a monthly sponsor-a-child program.

☑ Fact: On average, recurring donors who give through DonateNow pages give 42% more per year than one-time donors.

How to Construct a Gift String

In addition to letting donors fill in their own donation amount, give them a shortcut by offering suggested giving amounts. This makes it easier for your donors—and can motivate them to give more.

Why is this? The answer is "anchoring."

Donors want cues for how much to donate. They might have a number in mind but aren't sure what level will make an impact. Presenting defined choices gives context—an anchor—for what might be considered a "low" amount vs. a higher-end contribution.

Simply adjusting how you position your suggested giving amounts can increase the average gift by 25% or more! Here's how:

To create your suggested giving amounts—or gift string—use your average gift as a starting point for calculation. Set the lowest donation choice slightly below the average and the second choice slightly higher. People are more likely to choose one of the middle amounts—and most likely the second option.

For instance, if your average online gift is $40, you might set your first donation amount at $30 and your second amount at $50 or $60. Then, add a few higher donation amounts. (Unless you have a good reason to do so, don't add a number so high that it's unrealistic, like $25,000.)

Here's a reasonable starter gift string:

$25 $50 $100 $250 $500

As you gain experience with your donors' giving patterns and average gifts, you can adjust these amounts. Note: Make your anchor points realistic for your target audience.

Consider using impact labels.

Tying giving amounts to specific impact levels helps donors understand how their support will matter to those you serve. Illustrate what each gift level could provide to help donors visualize the result of their donation.

Add descriptions next to each giving level if:

→ You can concretely say how each giving level will make a difference: "$100 provides supplies for one student."

→ Significant benefits come with each level: free museum admission, special gifts.

Good descriptions can inspire giving and increase giving levels. Boring or complicated descriptions add clutter and have the opposite effect. Don't force it if you have nothing to say.

★ Tip: If you mention your gift string in email appeals, make sure it matches what the donor sees when they reach your donation page.

Other Common Giving Options to Consider

Donation Premiums

If you offer thank you gifts, including them on your donation form is convenient for you and the donor. For best results, these gifts should be clearly tied to your mission and further the emotional bond with your organization. Research shows these types of thank you gifts can encourage giving.

Honorary Gifts

Many donors are moved to give—and to give more—in honor or memory of a loved one. Offer donors the choice to give in someone's name. Not doing so may send the message that this isn't possible—and cause people to give elsewhere.

Donation "Tips"

Give donors the opportunity to cover your transaction processing costs. People understand that credit card transactions cost money; most are happy to defray these costs so that more money goes to your mission.

The Brain Science of Online Giving

Do you ever wish you could know exactly what goes on in the mind of a donor? Knowing just a little about the psychology of giving can help you connect with your donors—and get more gifts.

Why the Brain Matters in Giving

- → The emotional pull of photos.
- → The reason we're primed to give more when we see suggested giving amounts.
- → The love of all things pleasing to the eye.

All of these behaviors can be traced back to research on how the brain works. But why do donors give in the first place? And how can we use this to encourage them to give when they're on our websites and donation pages?

Here's what we know about the psychology of giving:

Giving is personal.

In the Money for Good study, respondents indicated that the top two reasons they give to causes were either a personal tie to the organization (or fundraiser) and personal experience with the organization's cause or work.

Giving is an emotional act.

The Donor Experience Guide from Crown Philanthropic Solutions tells us that "[t]he act of giving is an expression of gratitude and a search for meaning, which in turn leads to happiness. … Americans want to be happy. And they expect their experiences with philanthropy to help get them there."

The more you make people stop and think, the less they give.

Yale researcher David Rand found that participants in a series of experiments were most generous when they made quick decisions about how much to give or when they were prompted to remember a time when emotion had guided them to a good decision.

In addition to thinking, our brains are responsible for our instinctive reactions and our emotional selves. Fundraisers often tap into more than one region of our minds to help inspire giving.

Here's how it might work for your cause:

To reach the thinking brain: Show your ratings, financial reports, and a clear breakdown of where the money goes. Donors making a rational assessment of a charitable "investment" look for these things.

To reach the instinctual brain: Underscore what might happen if a donor doesn't give. What will they miss out on or what might be lost? Appealing to this sense of "loss aversion" helps tap into the "reptilian brain."

To reach the feeling brain: Remember what motivates giving; appeal to these feelings to reach your donor's generous spirit and desire to help. Emotions can trigger the personal connections that we know prompt most charitable acts. Create an experience rich with examples and photos to immerse your donor in the stories of your work.

★ Tip : When designing your donation page, keep in mind why donors give and speak to those motivations.

What's the Deal with Social Proof?

All of us are heavily influenced by our family, friends, and even those we perceive to be our peers. This is why we trust a local restaurant review on Yelp more than a corporate commercial. We call this "social proof." Donors are influenced by these same social cues when making decisions about charitable giving.

Here are two ways to make social proof work for your organization:

Show who's supporting you.

An endorsement from someone donors trust reinforces your credibility and transparency. On your donation page, include testimonials from other donors or beneficiaries; an endorsement or quote from a respected official, related organization, or community group; and any ratings or seals from places like GuideStar or Charity Navigator.

Show you're making progress.

Donors want to be on a winning team. You can illustrate that you have momentum (and support from others) by adding a ticker that counts how many donors have given to your cause or a donation thermometer that illustrates your progress toward a goal.

A word of warning: Empty thermometers or tickers can backfire and depress giving. Wait until you've gained some steam, and then turn on these features to encourage donors to boost you over the finish line.

✎ To-Do: Take inventory of your testimonials or online ratings. Pick the best one to include on your donation page. Don't have any? Make it your mission to get some in the next 30 days.

How Storytelling Can Help You Raise More Money

The best way to get people to relate and react to your cause is through stories. They help us open our emotional pathways as we visualize what is being communicated. Think about it—when's the last time you opened up emotionally because of a daily financial briefing?

Stories help us tap into emotion, but they also make your cause more transparent and relatable, because a good story typically focuses on a specific person, place, or thing. Telling a story requires us to zoom in on a scene and bring it to life for our donors. Here's why this matters:

Donors are skeptical and need reassurance. Being specific about what happens with donations lets donors know they can trust you.

Tangibility underscores that a donation will make a difference. Donors want to know they can effect change, not just be a drop in the bucket of an insurmountable problem.

Being concrete makes people relate more. People have a stronger emotional response to individuals or specific situation, which makes them more generous.

You want to describe your problem—and the results of your work—at a scale your donors can understand. Start with a simple story about how one person is affected by your work to see how powerful this can be.

★ Tip: Focus on telling a story throughout your fundraising campaign, and echo that story on your donation page with photos and a related call to action.

The Mechanics of Testing and Tracking

The only way to improve your landing page is to test it. If you aren't testing and measuring your donation page results, you're really just guessing at what works for your donors.

Why Test?

Here are four simple reasons for testing your donation pages:

Your audience is unique. Donors respond differently to images, layouts, gift strings, and colors. Testing helps you find out which ones resonate best for your particular audience so you can raise more money.

Small changes can make a big difference. The 2013 M&R and NTEN e-Benchmarks Study found that nonprofits that test their landing pages often see completion rates climb as much as 10%.

You don't want to lose them at the finish line. You spend tons of effort (and often money) getting prospects to the donation form (think email pushes, social media promotion, search engine marketing). Convert as much traffic as possible with an optimized form.

You will learn over time. By testing your pages, you will establish your own benchmarks and learn over time what works (and what doesn't) for your audience.

How to Test Your Page

We recommend two types of tests for your online donation form: usability testing and A/B testing.

Usability Testing

Usability testing helps you uncover issues that may derail a donor. In this technique, you watch test users complete the donation and note any barriers they encounter to making the transaction.

Three good usability tests will surface 80% of major usability speed bumps.

1. **The Friend Test:** Find someone who isn't familiar with your organization. Give them the URL of your donation page, then watch how quickly that person figures out what site they're on, what page they're on, and how to find out more. Simply watch the person interact with your donation page and ask them to call out anything that seems unclear.

2. **Task Testing:** Have your tester go through the process of making a donation online. Have them talk about where they're going, what they're doing, where they're having problems or are confused, and what they're clicking on and why. This can expose difficulties a potential donor may have or reveal overly complex portions of your donation process.

3. **Hypothetical Testing:** Give your subjects a hypothetical situation—they've heard of your organization and are considering donating to it, but first they need to get on the website and do some research to see if everything's on the level. Again, have them talk through the process, what they like and don't like, what caught their eye or drew them in, if they found everything easily, and what information is missing that they were expecting.

One afternoon of usability testing can provide you with all the information you need to drastically improve your online donation process—and gain more donations—for free!

The Quick and Dirty Guide to A/B Testing

A/B testing helps you decide which images, calls to action, and suggested donation amounts perform best by comparing the effectiveness of two versions of your donation page. A randomly chosen 50% of your audience is served one form (the control), and the other half gets another form (the test). The test version has just one variable changed: the layout, image, copy, or headings.

Over time, monitor which form has the higher completion rate, calculated as follows: **number of donations divided by the number of people who landed on the form.**

Here's a simple step-by-step guide:

1. Set up a control donation form.

2. Decide which variable you want to test (see "What to Test" below).

3. Set up a test donation form with that variable changed.

4. Make both forms live.

5. Track completion rates across both forms, calculated by the number of donations divided by the number of people who landed on the form.

6. Monitor results over time.

7. Run your results through a statistical significance calculator like this one.*

8. The winner of this test becomes your control.

9. Start again. Test another variable against your new control.

* Statistically significant results ensure that your results did not occur purely by chance.

When to Test
The best time to test is when you anticipate a significant amount of traffic to your form. For example:

→ During a specific email campaign.
→ During December, when a majority of online giving occurs.
→ During high-profile media moments.

Higher traffic volumes mean a higher chance that you will get statistically significant results. If you have low traffic volume, you must test for a longer period of time to get significant results.

What to Test

Here are a few of the most high-yield donation form tests:

→ Imagery: Does a polar bear beat a penguin?

→ Layout: Does a one-column form beat a two-column form?

→ Testimonials: Does a testimonial increase completion rates?

→ Gift strings: Does a lower gift string increase completion rates?

→ Copy: Does shorter intro copy beat longer intro copy?

→ Premiums: Does offering a premium increase completions?

What Not to Test

→ More than one variable at a time.

→ Colors that are outside your organization's branding.

→ Images that are too similar.

→ Copy that is too similar in tone and length.

Interpreting Results

1. After a period of time, run your results through the significance calculator. If you have statistically significant results, you can name the winner and move on to another test.

2. If you don't have a statistically significant winner, keep the test live for few more weeks to collect more data.

3. If you still don't have a statistically significant winner (and this sometimes happens), try testing a different variable.

Measuring Your Donation Page

The blessing of data is the ability for us to benchmark, test, and track our performance over time. The curse is that all metrics are not created equal.

What do all these metrics mean, and how can they help you optimize your online program to raise more money?

The golden rule of metrics tracking is "goals first, metrics second."

→ First, you must identify your goals. What are you trying to do?

→ Second, you must identify the metrics best suited to measuring those goals.

Example Dashboard

Here's a short example of what a monthly online fundraising dashboard might include. This dashboard reflects high-level metrics that should be reviewed with your supervisor, board chair, or chief marketing or development officer.

GOAL	METRICS	MONTHLY CHANGE	ANNUAL CHANGE
Increase awareness of our organization	Web traffic measured by number of monthly visitors	Percentage monthly change	Percentage annual change
Raise money from our community	Total dollars raised online per month	Percentage monthly change	Percentage annual change
	Number of gifts/donors monthly	Percentage monthly change	Percentage annual change
	Monthly average gift	Percentage monthly change	Percentage annual change
	Percentage raised monthly by source	Email marketing, website, online advertising, social networking, peer to peer, etc.	

★ Tip: When measuring your donation page results, place a high priority on tracking gift levels and which traffic sources lead to donors completing your form.

Optimizing Special Campaigns

When it comes to online fundraising, one size definitely does not fit all. Customizable donation pages make it easy to create landing pages and forms that perfectly match your specific fundraising goals.

All Campaigns Are Not the Same

All fundraising campaigns are special, but some are more special than others. They might have a specific focus, restriction, or goal that makes them different than a general fundraising campaign or an everyday donation page.

When your fundraising campaign has a special focus, your online donation page should follow suit. A separate donation page for special campaigns allows you to continue raising money for your general fund on your website while focusing on targeted campaigns for recurring donations, special events, or individual programs. When a donor lands on a page that has options and prompts that match your campaign criteria, they won't wonder if they landed in the wrong spot.

Optimize Your Page for Special Campaigns

As you create or update your donation page for special campaigns, keep in mind that your goal is to **achieve maximum message match**. Your images, language, and giving options should be consistent with your appeals and campaign type. If your appeal focuses on supporting a particular program, don't make donors hunt to find how to designate their gift.

Copy

If your campaign is all about the Annual Super Mega Mission Match, when you send supporters to your donation page to join the Annual Super Mega Mission Match, your page better have a big headline that says something like "Give to the Annual Super Mega Mission Match Today." It's also a good idea to include a few short—and we mean short—lines to describe and reiterate the goal of the Annual Super Mega Mission Match and what will happen as a result of the gift.

Images

Does the Annual Super Mega Mission Match have a special logo or campaign image? Then it needs to be on your donation page to let donors know that they've arrived at the correct destination. Remember: Your donation page should visually match your nonprofit's brand and the campaign materials that brought them to the page in the first place.

Options

I think you can guess what we're going to say here. If the Annual Super Mega Mission Match is all about recurring gifts or has a minimum gift level, don't offer unrelated options. You shouldn't have to do much explaining to allow your donor to complete their donation. Create a clear and easy path, then let donors do their thing.

As always, the goal here is to remove any friction that might slow down our donors or make it difficult for them to give to the campaign. When a donor has to stop and reconcile discrepancies or sift through unrelated giving options, they're more likely to eye the door instead of your donation page.

📝 To-Do: List three things that make your campaign unique. Make sure these three items are prominently featured on your donation page.

Special Campaign Examples and Ideas

Here are some of the most common fundraising campaigns that you can tailor donation page design, language, and giving options to reinforce your goals.

Recurring giving: Create a page that's all about recurring giving and establishes a clear path for donors to make a monthly gift.

Special events: Special events need special pages. A dedicated donation page speaks specifically to this event while keeping your everyday donation page up and running.

Capital campaign: Capital campaigns raise large sums for projects like opening a new building or renovating a shelter kitchen. Focus on your specific message in a dedicated donation page.

Specific programs: If your donors are giving to a specific program with a clear identity, set up a donation page that feels seamless with your messaging.

High-dollar campaign: If you have a campaign for high-dollar donors, don't send them to your donation page with a default giving level of $50.

Membership drive: Giving and joining aren't always the same in donors' minds. Set up a special page if membership is a key part of your fundraising. Tailor the language to fit the action you want donors to take.

⭐ Tip: Dedicated donation pages give you the freedom to be more specific and better describe donor options and benefits.

The Wonders of a Great Post-Donation Experience

Keep the love alive! Your donation confirmation is a great opportunity to keep that "helper's high" going while the donor is feeling great about your work.

Your Most Valuable Donor Retention Real Estate

Your post-donation experience has a lot riding on it. Think of it as a launch pad for happy donors.

According to the Association of Fundraising Professionals' Fundraising Effectiveness Survey Report, for every 100 new donors that nonprofits gained, 105 walked out. Not exactly the growth most nonprofits are looking for.

One of the best ways to reduce donor churn is to place a priority on high-quality donor communications. Your job isn't done once someone clicks to submit their donation. The post-donation confirmation page is your first opportunity to show donors that they made the right decision when they gave to your organization—and can make or break your chances of getting another gift.

★ Tip: Your confirmation page should complement the entire experience of your campaign. Match this page to your website, appeal, and donation page.

What to Offer Donors After They Give

Your donors are giving to you and the people you help. Once they complete their gift, a robotic message like "your donation has been processed" will just not do.

Here are your post-donation musts:

Send a confirmation and receipt.
The confirmation page should reassure donors that their gift was successfully completed. Your donors should also receive an emailed receipt that includes a summary of the donation details and information on tax deductibility. Your confirmation page should also list this information.

Offer a warm thank you.
Let's agree on this: A receipt is not a thank you. Since we've established that you are not a robot, your donation confirmation page should feature a nice thank you message that was written by a real human. Next, help donors feel great about giving by sending them a warm, timely thank you letter.

Stay in touch and keep them up to date on their donation's impact so they feel like a true part of your community. When donors know their gift is appreciated and made a difference, they're more likely to give again.

Enable and encourage social sharing.

Make it easy for donors to share your message and raise money on your behalf. Include social sharing buttons on your donation confirmation and thank you pages, as well as in thank you letters and follow-up emails.

Enlist donors as advocates.

Enthusiastic supporters are often your best spokespeople. Let their passion create a wave of donations by giving donors a way to reach out to specific connections via email. Provide some suggested language to help them talk about your cause and the impact donations will have. You can also teach them how to set up a fundraising campaign with a peer-to-peer fundraising tool, such as CrowdRise.

Plan for a Long-Term Relationship

Beyond your confirmation page, you need to have a process in place for developing a relationship with your donors. Making good on your promises and keeping donors involved and informed about their impact will help you improve donor retention rates. As you think about your donor stewardship plan, ask yourself these eight key questions:

1. Who is primarily responsible for donor communication and donor retention?

2. How will you thank donors once a donation is made?

3. How often do you plan to update donors on the impact of their gift?

4. What is your policy on timing before asking for another gift?

5. Will you have any special programs or events that are exclusive to donors?

6. Do longtime or high-dollar donors get special treatment or acknowledgement?

7. How do you plan to gather feedback from your donors?

8. How will you track and report on donor retention?

★ Tip: Create a donor retention plan that reflects your organization's personality and values. For more ideas, download our Donor Stewardship Checklist .

As part of your post-donation experience, remember to have a plan for implementing donor options such as thank you gifts, memorial gift acknowledgements, or matching gift follow-up.

How to Get More People to Your Page

Can you imagine putting so much effort into your donation page only to have nobody see your handiwork? We're going to show you some very simple strategies to draw people to your page and support your mission.

How to Get More People to Your Donation Page

Even if you have the best donation page in the world (and we're sure you're pretty close at this point), it won't generate donations all by itself. You need a strategic plan for reaching out to your target audience and encouraging them to understand and support your cause.

Here are six key things to keep in mind as you drive traffic to your website and donation page:

1. Make it painfully easy to find the "donate" option.

Marketing guru Seth Godin says our target markets are often "lazy people in a hurry." Your audience is bombarded with hundreds of messages each day. Adding to the clutter or making it hard to figure out how to give is a one-way ticket to doom. Big, bold, beautiful donation buttons are what we're after.

2. Make it clear where the money goes.

Now is the time to be completely transparent about what you do with contributions and gifts. Honesty and openness make your organization trustworthy. Illustrate this with testimonials, endorsements, and badges from groups like Charity Navigator or the Better Business Bureau.

3. Explain the how of your mission (not just the what).

Just because you're out to "end poverty" or "save animals" doesn't differentiate you from the other anti-poverty or animal-friendly charity down the street. Paint the picture of how your nonprofit is getting the job done in addition to explaining what the job is. Be specific!

4. Appeal to donors' ideals and values.

Put yourself in your donors' shoes: What's most important to me? Convenience, a happy feeling, or a sense of accomplishment? Do I want to affect a certain group of people's lives? Your mission won't tug at the heartstrings of every single person—but make sure it hits home with your target audience(s).

5. Show your connection to or presence in the local community.

This element is key to making the ask: Do your best to make a connection to the people and places from which you're soliciting donations. Whether your program work is in Africa or your soup kitchen is on Main Street, include language to offer a sense of relevance to your website visitors.

6. Don't forget to ask.

This is not the time to be shy about asking for donations. Now that you've made it easy and compelling to become a part of your nonprofit's work and impact, reach out to your audience and send an appeal.

The Right Way to Use Your Donation Button

Big buttons matter. Big, bold, juicy, bordering-on-obnoxious donate buttons.

Unfortunately, many nonprofits offer tiny, buried buttons—which might as well be no buttons at all! Why does this matter? Research shows that size does matter: Bigger donate buttons can help convert more donors!

Here are the six qualities of effective donation buttons to keep in mind as you integrate your online donation page into your website, emails, and more:

1. Make it big.

Your website visitors should find your donate button in two seconds or less. A tiny text link in the footer is tough for on-the-fence (or even die-hard) donors to find. And if donors can't easily find a way to give, they may think you don't need their donation. Not exactly the message you want to send. Here's an example of what we consider a BIG button:

2. Make it bold.

Your button should stand out from your website and landing pages. If your entire site is blue, a blue button is not going to pop. Choose a contrasting color that works with your brand but still commands attention.

3. Put it "above the fold."

"Above the fold" is a term rooted in print publications. It means an item is located near the top of a Web page and can be viewed in a browser without scrolling down. Give your donate button prime real estate so your visitors have a quick and easy way to make a donation.

4. Is it really a button?

When is a button not a button? When readers don't click on it. Your button should look like a button (think pill-shaped) and give donors clues that it's clickable.

5. Words matter.

What you call your button matters as much as its shape and color. This means no vague words like "help" or "support"—stick with clear, action-oriented words like GIVE or DONATE. Better yet: DONATE NOW. Tell supporters exactly what to expect when they click that button, then take them straight to the donation page without any intermediate steps.

6. Set it free.

Include a link to donate in every communication you send out. Put a link in your email signature. Include your donate button in your email campaigns. List your website on all offline communications, too. When interested supporters visit your site, they'll have no trouble completing their donation!

★ Tip: View your website on your computer and mobile device. Can you see your donate button without squinting? Go big or go home!

About Network for Good

Network for Good powers more digital giving than any other platform. Since 2001, we've processed over $1 billion for more than 100,000 nonprofits. We are Level 1 Audited PCI Compliant and our Donor Advised Fund is accredited by the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, meeting all 20 of its standards for charity accountability. Plus, we're registered in every state for online fundraising.

We're a mission-minded organization, like you, and we're passionate about seeing good causes succeed. We also believe in the power of communities to do great things.

Our online fundraising solutions come with all of the support and coaching you've come to expect from Network for Good. We're here to help you connect with donors and create more successful fundraising campaigns.

Ready to get even more from your online fundraising campaigns?

We've got you covered.

We'd love to hear about your fundraising goals and how you're reaching out to donors online. We'll offer suggestions on the tools that are right for your organization and show you some great campaigns for inspiration. To schedule a demo or find out more, **contact us today: 888.284.7978, option 1**

Or visit us online to reserve a time with one of our fundraising consultants.

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