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DRIVE
30%
MORE DONATIONS

A comprehensive website checklist for nonprofits — built from real campaigns, real conversions, and hard-won lessons from the field.

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WE KNOW EXACTLY WHERE NONPROFITS LOSE DONORS.

We've watched legal teams add three extra fields to a donation form. We've seen powerful stories end with nowhere to go. We've rebuilt navigation organized around the org chart instead of the person giving.
We're wandr — and in ten years, every client we've taken on has had a mission worth fighting for.

We earned this the hard way.

Across every engagement, the work looks the same: fighting to strip donation forms down to essentials, pre-writing advocacy letters so supporters can act in seconds, and rebuilding page flows so every action leads naturally to the next. No dead ends.

Giving flows that once haemorrhaged mobile donors started converting, from one-time petition signers to repeat organizers.

That work is the foundation of everything in this checklist.

Our belief, plainly stated:

Most nonprofit websites are built to impress stakeholders, not convert donors. We build for the person who arrives knowing nothing — and leave them with no excuse not to act.
The ask should always feel earned. When it does, conversion isn't a tactic. It's a natural outcome.

Use everything in this checklist that you can. And if the scope of what needs to change feels bigger than your team can take on — that's exactly what we're here for.

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01
CLARITY, CREDIBILITY &
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Before anyone donates, they need to believe in you

☐ **State your mission in the first 5 seconds**　　+ High Impact

A visitor should know exactly what you do, who you help, and why it matters —
without scrolling. Treat this as a headline, not a paragraph. For example, Charity:
Water's entire homepage opens with "100% of your gift funds clean and safe
drinking water." That's the bar.

☐ **Lead with outcomes, not activities**　　+ High Impact

Donors don't fund programs — they fund change. For example, replace "we run
animal rescue operations" with "we've saved 4,200 animals from captivity since
2010." Specificity earns trust. Vagueness loses it.

☐ **Display trust signals prominently**　　+ High Impact

Charity Navigator rating, BBB accreditation, press logos, partner organizations,
awards, financial transparency links. These should live above the fold or near the
donation CTA — not buried in an "About" page.

☐ **Show where money goes — with a clear visual**　　+ High Impact

The #1 donor objection is "I don't know if my money will be used well." A simple
pie chart, icon breakdown, or bold percentage ("94¢ of every dollar goes directly
to the field") kills this objection before it forms.

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☐ **Use real photography, not stock images** ✦ Important

Documentary-style, authentic images of real beneficiaries create emotional connections that staged corporate photography never will. If you only have a small set, use them intentionally — one powerful image beats ten mediocre ones.

☐ **Include a human face in your hero section** ✦ Important

Human faces — especially eyes making contact with the camera — dramatically increase emotional engagement and time on page. Show the people your work serves, not your logo or a landscape.

☐ **Audit your homepage for information overload** ✦ Quick Win

More information ≠ more credibility. It often means overwhelmed visitors who leave. Top-load the most important message and let visitors choose their depth. If everything is important, nothing is.

02

DONATION FORM
OPTIMIZATION

The checkout experience is where most nonprofits lose donors

☐ **Reduce your donation form to the minimum legally required fields** ✦ High Impact

Every additional field is friction. Fight your legal team on this — the minimum required by law is your ceiling, not your floor. Ask for name and email only at checkout; profile deeper over time through follow-up. You get their money first, then their data.

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☐ **Use anchor amounts tied to real-world outcomes** ✦ High Impact

"$25" means nothing. "$25 feeds a hungry child for a week" creates conviction. Pre-set 3–4 giving amounts where each is tied to a specific, tangible outcome. This lifts average gift size and removes the anxiety of "is my gift big enough?"

☐ **Make monthly/recurring giving the default — or at minimum, equal** ✦ High Impact

Frame recurring giving as membership in impact, not a subscription fee. "Become a monthly guardian" outperforms "Set up recurring donations." Pre-select monthly giving or place it visually first. Monthly donors are 5× more valuable over time than one-time donors.

☐ **Keep the donation experience on your own domain** ✦ High Impact

Redirecting users to a third-party payment URL breaks trust and kills momentum. At minimum, ensure the donation page is visually consistent with your site — same branding, same header. Jarring transitions signal insecurity and lose donors mid-flow.

☐ **Display security badges and privacy reassurance near the form** ✦ Important

SSL padlock, "Secure checkout," and a one-line privacy note ("We never sell your information") placed directly adjacent to the submit button reduce abandonment. Small signals, big impact.

☐ **Offer multiple payment methods** ✦ Important

Credit card, PayPal, Apple Pay, and Google Pay at minimum. Each payment method you add reduces abandonment for a segment of donors. Apple Pay in particular eliminates form-filling entirely on mobile — which is where most of your traffic lives.

☐ **Optimize for mobile — then test it yourself** ✦ High Impact

Complete a real donation on your own site using your phone, with one thumb, on 4G. If it takes more than 2 minutes, you're losing mobile donors. Tap targets should be finger-sized, fields should auto-zoom correctly, and the submit button must be visible without scrolling.

☐ **Show a real-time progress indicator on fundraising goals** ✦ Important

Goal-based giving ("Help us raise $50,000 by December") with a visible progress bar uses social proof and urgency together. People give more readily when they can see they're part of a collective effort that's actually moving.

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The biggest lift in conversion happens when visitors quickly understand the mission, see credible proof of impact, and are guided to the next best action without friction."

Paul
Design Director, Wandr Studio

03

CONTEXTUAL GIVING & "DONATE WITHOUT LEAVING THE STORY"

Capture momentum while emotional engagement is highest

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☐ **Add inline giving prompts within program and story pages**   ✦ High Impact

After a visitor reads about a specific rescue or campaign, place a contextual "Fund this work" module — not a generic "Donate" link. Tie the ask directly to what they just read: "Support our emergency rescue fund → $75 covers one animal's emergency intake." Emotion + relevance = conversion.

☐ **Place a CTA at the end of every piece of long-form content**   ✦ High Impact

Every article, story, and program page that doesn't end with a natural next step is a dead end. The CTA doesn't always have to be "Donate" — it can be "Sign the petition," "Share this story," or "Get email updates" — but it must exist.

☐ **Use campaign-specific donation pages, not one generic form**   ✦ Important

A donor who clicks "Send a child to summer school" and lands on a generic "Donate to [Organization]" page with a program dropdown will second-guess whether their money is going to the right place. Match the headline, photo, and language from your email or ad all the way through to the form. Platforms like Classy and Donorbox make this a one-hour job, not a rebuild.

☐ **Test a lighter "round-up" or entry-level giving prompt**   ✦ Important

Not every visitor is ready to give $100. A "Give $5 to cover today's costs" or "Add $10 to your action" option captures first-time donors who would otherwise convert to nothing. First gift relationships are the most valuable ones to cultivate.

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04 NAVIGATION & INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

Navigation is a leadership decision, not just a design exercise

☐ **Limit your top-level navigation to 4–5 items maximum** ✦ High Impact

More nav items signal organizational complexity and dilute attention. The best non-profit sites in the world have 3. Ruthlessly prioritize: What We Do / Why It Matters / How to Help. Everything else is secondary navigation.

☐ **Make "Donate" a persistent, visually distinct button in your header** ✦ High Impact

It should not be a nav link styled the same as "About Us." It should be a button — different colour, different weight — visible at all times on both desktop and mobile. Don't make donors hunt for how to give you money.

☐ **Reflect how you talk about your work today, not 5 years ago** ✦ Important

Many non-profit sites are organized around the org chart, not around user needs. Audit whether your navigation reflects how your team currently describes its work — not the structure from your last major redesign. Language evolves; sites rarely keep up.

☐ **Design distinct entry paths for different user types** ✦ Important

A first-time visitor has different needs than a lapsed donor or an advocate. Feeding America and Boys & Girls Clubs both offer explicit pathways ("For donors / For volunteers / For families") that reduce cognitive load and increase relevance from the first click.

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☑ **Ensure no page is a dead end** ✦ Quick Win

Audit your 10 most-visited pages. Does each one offer a logical next step? "Related content," program links, or a soft CTA should appear on every page. Dead ends are silent conversion killers — visitors leave because you gave them no reason to stay.

05

ADVOCACY:
REDUCE EFFORT, RAISE ENGAGEMENT

A signed petition is a relationship starter, not a one-time transaction

☑ **Pre-write letters to representatives — supporters personalize, not draft** ✦ High Impact

When you ask someone to "write a letter to your senator," 90% won't. When you give them a templated letter they can personalize in 30 seconds, most will. Do the heavy lifting. Reduce the ask from "effort" to "endorsement."

☑ **Make the outcome of every action crystal clear** ✦ High Impact

Supporters need to know: Who receives this? What does it affect? What happens next? "Your signature goes directly to the Senate Environment Committee, which votes on this bill in March" is infinitely more motivating than "Sign our petition."

☑ **Design a post-action engagement ladder** ✦ High Impact

After signing → prompt to share, then subscribe. After donating → prompt to follow a campaign, then advocate. After subscribing → recommend a specific action based on interest. Every completed action should immediately surface the most natural next one. Treat this as a system, not a series of one-offs.

☐ **Centralize and surface all advocacy opportunities** ✦ Important

Don't bury petitions inside program pages. Create a dedicated, easily navigable section where all active campaigns, petitions, and actions live. Visitors who want to act shouldn't have to discover opportunities by accident.

☐ **Provide toolkits for supporters to self-organize locally** ✦ Important

For organizations with a national or global reach: give local advocates templates, social graphics, talking points, and event guides. Turning one advocate into a local organizer multiplies your impact without adding headcount. This is the "grassroots at scale" model.

06

EMAIL SIGN UPS:
VALUE-FIRST CAPTURE

Your email list is your most durable, highest-converting asset

☐ **Replace "Sign up for updates" with value-driven language** ✦ High Impact

"Get action alerts when your voice matters most" outperforms "Subscribe to our newsletter" in every test. Frame the email relationship as something the subscriber gains — not something you collect. Be specific: what will they receive and how often? High Impact

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☐ **Place sign-up prompts after your highest-emotion content** ✦ High Impact

A sign-up placed at the bottom of a powerful impact story or after a harrowing rescue article captures intent while it's highest. Emotion drives email conversions, not generic footer forms. Inline sign-ups after strong content consistently outperform pop-ups and sidebars. High Impact

☐ **Ask for email only — profile deeper over time** ✦ Quick Win

First name + email is the maximum for initial sign-up. Use progressive profiling in subsequent emails (interests, location, preferences) to personalize without creating sign-up friction. You can always ask more questions later — you cannot undo an abandoned form. Quick Win

☐ **Build a welcome email sequence that earns the next action** ✦ High Impact

New subscribers should receive a series: (1) Thank you + one powerful impact story, (2) Here's how your voice helps, (3) Here's your first action to take, (4) Invitation to deepen commitment. Don't pitch for a donation in email one — build the relationship first. High Impact

☐ **Send post-donation impact updates — automatically** ✦ High Impact

Donors who see the impact of their gift are dramatically more likely to give again. Build a simple sequence into your email platform: personalized thank-you → proof of impact → next action invitation. Most donors never hear what their money did. Be the organization that tells them. High Impact

☐ **Segment your list and tailor communications** ✦ Important

At minimum: (1) New donors, (2) Recurring donors, (3) Lapsed donors, (4) Email subscribers only. Each group has different needs and different next steps. Sending everyone the same email treats your most loyal supporters the same as cold leads. Segmentation lifts open rates, clicks, and conversion. Important

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07
PEER-TO-PEER & COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

Your best fundraisers are your existing donors

☐ **Launch a birthday fundraising program**　　✦ Important

Charity: water built $1 billion in donations on the back of birthday fundraising. Ask supporters to give their birthday to your cause — even 1% of your email list running birthday campaigns annually creates a compound fundraising engine that grows every year.

☐ **Make sharing frictionless after every action**　　✦ Quick Win

After donating, signing, or subscribing: serve a pre-written tweet, pre-formatted Facebook message, and a shareable graphic ready to post. Most supporters want to spread the word — they just won't write the copy themselves. Do it for them in one click.

☐ **Build social proof into donation pages**　　✦ Important

Real-time donor feeds ("37 people donated in the last 24 hours"), recent donor names (with permission), and testimonials from recurring donors all reduce the anxiety of being "first." People give when they see others giving.

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08

SEO, PERFORMANCE & ACCESSIBILITY

Good UX is good SEO. Build once, benefit forever.

☐ **Test your page load speed and fix what's above 3 seconds**　　✦ High Impact

Every second of load time costs ~7% of conversions. Run Google PageSpeed Insights on your homepage and donation page today. Unoptimized images are the #1 culprit for nonprofits. Compress, lazy-load, and eliminate render-blocking scripts. High Impact

☐ **Ensure one strong, focused page per core topic**　　✦ Important

Avoid splitting content across 5 thin pages about the same topic. Search engines reward depth and authority. One comprehensive, well-organized page on "Wildlife Rescue in California" outranks five scattered paragraphs every time. Important

☐ **Use clear heading hierarchy (H1 → H2 → H3) on every page**　　✦ Quick Win

This aids both accessibility (screen readers) and SEO (search engines read headings to understand content structure). Your H1 should reflect what the page is actually about — not just your org name. This is a 30-minute audit that can move rankings. Quick Win

☐ **Set up and monitor 301 redirects for all old URLs**　　✦ Quick Win

Broken links lose both SEO equity and donor trust. After any site restructure, audit and redirect every old URL that previously had backlinks or traffic. A free Screaming Frog crawl will surface all 404 errors in under an hour. Quick Win

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☐ **Meet WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards** ✦ Important

Color contrast ratios, keyboard navigation, alt text for images, and ARIA labels aren't just ethical requirements — they're also Google ranking signals. Use the WAVE browser extension for a free accessibility audit. Accessibility serves your mission and your search visibility simultaneously. Important

09 MEASUREMENT & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

What you don't measure, you can't improve

☐ **Set up event tracking for your full donation funnel** ✦ High Impact

Track: donation page views → form start → payment entered → completion. Each drop-off point tells you where to focus. Most nonprofits only track final conversions — this is like navigating with a map that only shows the destination, not the route. High Impact

☐ **Segment funnel data by device type** ✦ Important

Mobile donors abandon at dramatically different stages than desktop donors. If your mobile completion rate is 40% of desktop, that's your top priority — not a new campaign. Separate your funnel views by device before drawing any conclusions about conversion. Important

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☐ **Run A/B tests on your highest-traffic CTAs first**   ✦ Important

Start with the highest leverage points: your hero CTA language, donation amount pre-sets, and the headline on your donation page. Small wording changes ("Give Now" vs. "Protect an Animal Today") can produce 20–40% conversion lifts. Run one test at a time with sufficient sample size before concluding. Important

☐ **Review your top 10 pages by traffic monthly — and act on what you see**   ✦ Quick Win

High-traffic pages with no conversion path are your biggest opportunity. A program page with 5,000 monthly visitors and no donation CTA is leaving thousands of dollars on the table. Monthly reviews ensure you're optimizing where it matters. Quick Win

☐ **Collect first-party data through post-donation surveys**   ✦ Important

As third-party cookies deprecate, your owned donor data becomes your most valuable asset. Add a 2-question survey to the donation confirmation page: "What motivated your gift today?" and "How did you hear about us?" This data will shape every future campaign. Important

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Navigation isn't a list — it should be a guide. The same is true of your entire site. Every page, every click, every sentence should lead somewhere worth going."

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Information Architecture Philosophy

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THE WORK DOESN'T END HERE

This checklist is a starting point. The organizations that move fastest are the ones who don't try to do it alone.

When you're ready — we're here.

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organizations with a mission.

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MERCY FOR ANIMALS

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