Attracting Donors and Volunteers on Non-Profit and Charity Websites

116 Design Guidelines for Improving the Usability of Essential Information and Processes on Charity and Non-Profit Websites

By Janelle Estes and Jakob Nielsen

Second edition
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Janelle Estes and Jakob Nielsen
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Executive Summary

Non-profits would collect much more from their websites if only they’d clearly state what they are about and how they use donations. Our new usability studies revealed considerable frustration as potential donors visited sites and tried to discern various organizations’ missions and goals—which are key factors in their decisions about whether to give money.

In 2008, non-profits got about 10% of their donations online, according to a survey by Target Analytics. Given the high growth rate for Internet donations, we estimate that they’ll constitute the majority of donations by 2020. If non-profit organizations get their sites into shape, that is.

Well-designed non-profit websites are particularly suited for attracting new donors and efficiently supporting small-scale impulse giving. Websites are less effective at sustaining long-term donor relationships. For encouraging customer (or donor) loyalty, email newsletters remain the Internet tool of choice.

USER RESEARCH

To discover how to design non-profit websites to encourage donations, we took our usual approach: we empirically observed actual user behavior as potential donors used a wide range of sites. This research was conducted in two rounds, two years apart. However, because the results were very similar in the two studies, we will not distinguish between these two rounds of research in most of this report. Instead, findings and recommendations will be reported across the studies.

In total, we tested 60 non-profit and charity websites, chosen to cover a range of categories:

- Arts, Culture, and Humanities
- Animals
- Development and Relief Services
- Education
- Environment
- Health
- Human Services
- Public Benefit
- Religion

Most of the sites represented major national non-profits, but we also tested some smaller, local charities as well as international organizations.

We tested seven tasks:

- **Choosing a recipient**: Participants used two non-profit sites within a given category and decided which of the organizations—which had roughly similar missions—was most deserving of a donation.

- **Making a first-time donation**: Using their own credit cards, participants made an online donation to the chosen charity. We reimbursed users for this expense after the study
• **Making a repeat donation**: Participants made an online donation to a charity that they had donated to in the past (prior to the study).

• **Making a non-monetary contribution**: Participants located information about donating a tangible item, such as pet food or used toys. For this task, we didn’t direct users to specific sites; they used the Web to find a suitable charity to receive their item.

• **Purchasing a product**: Participants were asked to buy an item for themselves—such as a cookbook from the American Diabetes Association—that a non-profit organization sold on its website.

• **Volunteering**: Participants researched information about becoming a volunteer at one of the organizations in the study.

• **Using Facebook to research charities**: Participants compared two similar non-profits on Facebook and selected one to receive a donation.

We recruited a broad sample of test participants, ranging in age from 20–61, with a roughly equal number of men and women. We included users with relatively little Internet experience (at least one year), as well as those with more experience (at least three years). Job titles spanned the alphabet, from attorney and bank assistant vice president to microbiologist, police office, small business owner, and teacher.

We screened out users who hadn’t made at least one donation to a non-profit or charity during the preceding year. While there’s a first time for everything, we wanted to test people who actually exhibit the behavior we were studying.

**WHAT DONORS WANT**

We asked participants what information they wanted to see on non-profit websites before they decided whether to donate. Their answers fell into four broad categories, two of which were the most heavily requested:

- The organization’s mission, goals, objectives, and work.
- How it uses donations and contributions.

That is: What are you trying to achieve, and how will you spend my money?

Sadly, only 47% of the sites we studied answered the first question on their homepage. Further, only a ridiculously low 5% answered the second question on the homepage. Although organizations typically provided these answers somewhere within the site, users often had problems finding this crucial information.

As we’ve long known, what people say they want is one thing. How they actually behave when they’re on websites is another. Of the two, we put more credence in the latter. We therefore analyzed users’ decision-making processes as they decided which organizations to support.

In choosing between two charities, people referred to five categories of information. However, an organization’s mission, goals, objectives, and work was by far the most important. Indeed, it was 2.6 times as important as the runner-up issue, which was how the organization uses the money it collects.

People want to know what a non-profit stands for, because they want to contribute to causes that share their ideals and values. Most people probably agree that, for example, it’s good to help impoverished residents of developing countries or patients suffering from nasty diseases. Many organizations claim to do these very things. The question in a potential donor’s mind is how the organization proposes to help. Often,
sites we studied failed to answer this question clearly—and lost out on donations as a result.

**WHAT KILLS DONATIONS**

In addition to observing what “closed the sale” for charities that attracted user contributions, we also analyzed the turn-off factors that caused charities to lose out, even after users had spent considerable time on their websites.

The donation-killers (percentages sum to 101 because of rounding):

- 50% were usability problems relating to page and site design, including unintuitive information architecture, cluttered pages, and confusing workflow.

- Amazingly, on 13% of the sites, users couldn’t find where to make a donation. You’d imagine that donation-dependent sites would at least get that one design element right, but banner-blindness or over-formatting caused people to overlook some donation buttons.

- 43% were content issues related to writing for the Web, including unclear or missing information and confusing terms.

- 8% of the time users simply disagreed with the organization’s approach.

**INTEGRATING LOCAL CHAPTERS WITH THE NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL SITE**

Missing or confusing information aside, the worst user experience erosion in this study was caused by heinous integration of local chapters with the higher-level organization.

As mentioned above, users wanted information about a non-profit’s activities in their communities, but the experience of actually visiting local chapter websites was stunning. Typically, such sites looked completely different than the master sites, even violating such elementary brand guidelines as using a consistent color scheme.

As for forging an integrated user experience across organization levels, forget it. Most non-profits could substantially improve their overall Web presence by creating a unified look and feel and supporting other improvements for local sites.

**DONATION PROCESS: OK**

Once people had decided to make a donation—and found the donation button on sites that made doing so difficult—it was fairly easy for them to proceed through the workflow and donate.

Our testing did identify some small usability problems, but the only big problem was caused by sites that used third-party payment services, which stumped some users.

Most of the donation processes had reasonable usability because they were essentially a scaled-back version of e-commerce checkout, with fewer complications. Designers know how to build good e-commerce checkouts, and users know how to deal with the expected components.

Despite these similarities, donations don’t exhibit nearly as streamlined user experience as most e-commerce sites. Completing the actual donation process took the users in our second study 7% more time on average than it took users to
complete an e-commerce checkout process in our (separate) research on e-commerce usability.¹

Even though 7% degradation of usability is not horrible, fixing a process with even minor usability problems might increase donations by around 7%. For a non-profit with a $10M budget and an average share of online donations, such minor tweaks could mean an extra $70,000 per year.

**NON-MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS: BAD**

Users had much more difficulty with making a non-monetary contribution than they had with donating money. One reason is obviously that giving physical items is a non-standard type of online transaction where users cannot rely on previous experience with other sites. (In contrast, giving money is quite similar to paying money, at least in terms of the buttons and fields you need to use.)

Any time a website asks users to do something new, the user interface should be particularly easy, to help users overcome the hurdle of understanding the new process. Sadly, most of the charities in our study actually provided particularly poor usability for this more challenging task; information about donating physical items was typically hard to find and rarely sufficiently specific.

As a result of the low usability for non-monetary donations, users typically bounced between many non-profit organizations before finding one that they wanted to give their items to. Users gave this experience the lowest satisfaction score we recorded in this research: an average rating of 5.3 on a 1–7 scale (7 best).

**VOLUNTEERING PROCESS: GOOD**

On our 1–7 scale, users gave a stellar rating of 6.7 for the task of finding out how to volunteer at an organization. Most sites had a simple direct link to this information from their homepage. And they mostly provided straightforward information about volunteering, including descriptions of typical volunteer duties and hours, which are details that prospective volunteers want to see up front.

Many sites also had fairly simple forms for volunteering, though it’s important to also provide contact information for people who want to talk to somebody before they volunteer.

**TOP PRIORITY: CLEAR-SPOKEN INFORMATION**

Our users gave a fairly low average rating of 5.3 for the task of finding out about an organization and determining its trustworthiness. In comparison, users’ average rating of the actual donation process was 5.7 (on a 1–7 scale; averaged across the sites in the study).

While improvements are still possible for the donation process itself, our usability research clearly showed that this isn’t the main difficulty that’s inhibiting the potential of online donations to quintuple over the next decade. Rather, the big problem is bad content usability.

So: speak plainly and answer donors’ main questions, and money will flow your way.

¹ Please see [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/ecommerce](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/ecommerce) for findings and design guidelines from our e-commerce studies. Non-profit organizations that sell products should follow e-commerce usability guidelines for the store area of their site in addition to the recommendations in the present report.
Research Overview

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on the results of two separate studies conducted to assess the usability of critical information and processes on non-profit and charity websites.

In our two studies, we tested a total of 60 websites with 21 users. We gave participants tasks to perform, and the facilitator sat next to the user and observed as the participant explored and made small donations and purchases on non-profit and charity websites.

In our first study, we asked users to research and evaluate two similar non-profit or charity organizations and choose one to make a donation to. Users were given 10–15 minutes to conduct research. After they had made a decision, they were asked to make a small donation using the organization’s website.

In our second round of research, we used the same tasks given in our first study, but we selected different organizations. We asked users to complete these tasks twice: once using an organization's website and a second time using an organization's Facebook page. Additionally, users were asked to complete the following tasks on non-profit and charity websites: determine an organization’s trustworthiness, make a donation (monetary and non-monetary), purchase an item, and find information about volunteering.

In order to test a wide variety of charity and non-profit websites, we broke the websites into groups, which are categorized below. We based our categorization loosely on the types of charities and non-profits listed on the Charity Navigator website (http://www.charitynavigator.org). We also chose charities and non-profits of various sizes; we mainly tested the sites of national organizations, but we also included the sites of some international and smaller, local organizations.

For details about the study methodology, see our Methodology section, which begins on page 209.

Web addresses for the sites tested are listed on page 208.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Type of Charity Tested</strong></th>
<th><strong>Websites Tested</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Arts, Culture, Humanities** | Corcoran Gallery of Art  
National Gallery of Art  
New Hampshire Children’s Museum  
New Hampshire Historical Society  
Pro Portsmouth Inc.  
Wentworth-Gardner & Tobias Lear Houses |
| **Animals** | Cochecho Valley Animal Shelter  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Kitty Angels  
MSPCA Angell  
NEADS, National Education for Assistance Dog Services  
Paws with a Cause  
Wildlife Alliance |
| **Development and Relief Services** | Acumen Fund  
Global Links  
Heifer International  
Hope for Haiti  
International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas  
New Israel Fund |
| **Education** | Children’s Scholarship Fund  
“I Have A Dream” Foundation  
Southern New Hampshire University  
Saint Anselm’s College  
Specialist Schools and Academies Trust  
University of New Hampshire |
| **Environment** | Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
The Conservation Fund  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Resource Renewal Institute  
Sustainable Conservation |
| **Health** | Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis  
Alzheimer’s Association  
American Cancer Society  
American Heart Association  
Beverly Hospital  
Brain Aneurysm Foundation  
Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center  
Lymphoma Research Foundation  
Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research  
Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Charity Tested</th>
<th>Websites Tested</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Human Services</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adoption Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Brothers Big Sisters of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys &amp; Girls Club of America</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child Advocates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Friends Program</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goodwill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Habitat for Humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Hampshire Food Bank</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Seacoast Family Food Pantry of New Hampshire</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stuffed Animals for Emergencies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Team Hoyt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Benefit</strong></td>
<td>Bread for the World Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NARAL Pro-Choice America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WaterStone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>The Interfaith Alliance Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mission America Coalition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Usability Matters

One of the main goals of non-profit websites is to attract and retain donors. Good design and usability will only help with these efforts. A clear, streamlined design that includes the critical information users want to know will inform people about the organization and move them through the donation process. If users struggle to understand the organization’s objectives and how their donation will be used, they are likely to find another organization to donate to—one that can clearly communicate its initiatives.

Target Analytics released an *Internet Giving Benchmarking Analysis*,\(^2\) based on data from 24 large non-profits. Among the participants in the Target survey, the annualized growth rate in the number of online donors was 33% a year from 2004-2008, whereas offline donors declined by 1% a year. For the latest year in the study (2007 compared with 2008), online donors grew 39% and offline declined 3%, which is in line with the 5-year average, given the natural fluctuations in such numbers.

In 2008, online only accounted for 9% of the donors and 11% of the donations. (The difference between these two percentages is due to the larger amounts donated online as compared to offline, on average.) Given the rapid growth in online donations, we estimate that online donations will account for the majority of donations by 2020, even after accounting for the inevitable decline in the growth rate in future years.

Averaged across the 24 non-profits in the Target survey, the 5-year cumulative value of a donor who started giving in 2004 was $237 for donors acquired online and $86 for donors acquired offline. This emphasizes the benefit for non-profits and charities to redesign their websites to appeal to new donors.

On the other hand, retention is lower for online donors than for direct-mail donors. This points to the need for non-profits to improve their email newsletters, which are the main way of promoting loyalty on the Internet\(^3\).

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\(^3\) The design of email newsletters is beyond the scope of the present report; instead, please see our separate report on this topic, available at [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters)
Online Donors: Why and When They Make Donations

Users in our study made decisions about what organizations to donate to and when to make donations based on a variety of factors. Most users reported that they donated to a non-profit or charity because they had a personal connection to the organization or its cause. For example, one user made an annual contribution to Saint Anselm’s College because he had graduated from the college. Another user made regular donations to the American Heart Association, because an immediate family member had passed away from a heart attack. A third donated to NARAL Pro-Choice America, because she was passionate about reproductive rights in the United States.

Users explained that they were often prompted by something before making a donation. For example, one user received a phone call from an organization during its “annual giving” period, which prompted him to donate to them over the phone. Another user donated to an organization when she received an email reminder or a flyer in the mail, because it reminded her to do so. A third user always donated to a non-profit or charity after a friend or family member passed away; she donated in lieu of sending flowers. Another user donated to certain organizations if his children or children in his neighborhood were raising money for a cause.

The time of year when users donated varied across participants. For example, one user donated to organizations at the end of the year, because she wanted to help those in need during the winter holiday season in the United States. Another donated towards the end of the tax year in the United States, December 31st, to maximize his deductions when filing his taxes. Another user always donated in October, which was Breast Cancer Awareness Month in the United States. Non-profits should look for trends in online donations and consider promoting site content to spike donor interest during popular giving times, such as year-end giving or associated awareness events.

The frequency of donations varied across participants. Some donated on a regular basis, while others donated once or twice per year. One user only donated whenever he had “extra money,” which was usually about six times per year. Another donated only once or twice per year, which he typically did in December. A third user made donations twice per month, which were automatically deducted from her husband’s paycheck each pay period.

In general, people didn’t complain about or have issues with the online donation process, and some people preferred it over other methods of donating. In fact, users gave the task of making an online donation an average satisfaction rating of 5.7 out of 7 (with 7 being the highest possible score.) One user said, “I’m more apt to do it online than through the mail.” Another user, who regularly donated to Heifer International, received their catalogue through the mail. She flipped through the catalogue to choose what she wanted to donate and then used their site to make the donation.

While users didn’t mind donating online, most users commented that they had to be familiar with an organization and its work before doing so. Users didn’t blindly donate to organizations; they had to have prior experience with or knowledge about what they did and how they did it.
Critical Content on Non-Profit and Charity Websites

People have high expectations of non-profit and charity websites. When users are evaluating these types of organizations, they have specific questions they want answered, and they expect the website to provide the desired information in a clear and understandable manner. If this information isn’t immediately available, users have little desire or motivation to find it. Critical information, such as the objectives of a non-profit or charity and how they use their donations, is frequently sought out by users.

INFORMATION PEOPLE WANTED TO KNOW BEFORE DONATING

In our studies, we asked users to tell us what they needed to know before they felt comfortable making a donation to a non-profit or charity. The table below includes the responses to this question, as well as the percentage of users who mentioned each response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Information</th>
<th>% of users who wanted to know this information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission, goals, objectives, and work</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of donations and contributions</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy and reputation</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local presence</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site security</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mission, goals, objectives, and work

Based on the responses of the users in our study, the most important piece of information people needed to know about a charity or non-profit was what they did and how they did it. Users were interested in details about the organization’s objectives, mission, goals, and programs. They wanted to know what a charity or non-profit stood for, because people wanted to contribute to an organization that had acceptable goals, ideals, and values. All users reviewed the homepage and navigated to the About Us category on non-profit and charity websites in search of these details.

In our study, we found that many sites failed to communicate this vital information, and users were often confused or annoyed because they couldn’t understand a convoluted mission statement or put together various pieces of information to form a valid opinion of the organization. On average, it took users just under six minutes (five minutes and 52 seconds) to locate the information, which was far too long.

Users were asked to answer a subjective questionnaire on their satisfaction levels after they conducted research about an organization. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most positive, the task received an average satisfaction rating of 5.3, which was one of the lowest average satisfaction ratings in our study.

For example, one user laughed out loud after reading the information on WaterStone’s About Us page, because the convoluted explanation didn’t help him understand what they did. He said he wouldn’t donate to the organization.
WaterStone’s About Us page didn’t clearly articulate what the organization did. If users were unable to understand the goals and objectives of a charity or non-profit, they were unlikely to make a donation. In our study, not one person made a donation to an organization that had objectives they didn’t understand or feel comfortable with.

**Use of donations and contributions**

Aside from understanding a charity or non-profit’s objectives, users wanted to know how donations and contributions were spent. People wanted to be certain that their money will be put to good use.

Throughout our study, people mentioned that they were concerned with how much of the organization’s donations actually went to the programs or initiatives and how much went to overhead, administrative costs, or outside fundraising organizations. Since this was a top question that users had, it’s critical to provide this information on a charity or non-profit website.

Some of the sites we tested, such as Action Against Hunger, provided facts and figures around how donations were used within the organization.

Action Against Hunger clearly stated how much of their money went to programs, fundraising, and overhead.

However, more often than not, users struggled to locate this information, which left potential donors wondering how their donation would be used and what percentage of it would be put towards programs and initiatives at the organization. Without the answer to these questions, some users were hesitant to make a donation to an organization, because they were unsure how effective it would be.

**Legitimacy and reputation**

An organization’s reputation and legitimacy is another important piece of information users needed to know before making a donation. In our study, people often used information such as watchdog ratings, high profile endorsements, testimonials, name recognition, number of years in operation, and recommendations from friends and family members to decide whether or not a non-profit or charity was worthy of their donation.
Users looked for and gravitated towards this type of information in our study and compiled it with other facts gathered from the website to decide whether or not to donate. If a non-profit or charity has this type of information to tout, it’s important to do so, because users wanted to know if an organization was credible before providing it with funds.

For example, the Children’s Scholarship Fund featured celebrities and other high-profile individuals in a video that explained their work, which helped build the organization’s credibility.

![Video](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

This video, featured on the Children’s Scholarship Fund’s homepage, included celebrities and other well-known individuals, which helped build the organization’s legitimacy among users.

**Local presence**

Users were interested in whether or not an organization had a presence in their local community. In our study, users were more likely to make a donation to a non-profit or charity if they worked in or provided some benefit to their local community. People were interested in improving situations around them and wanted to see their money put towards efforts that could improve their immediate surroundings.

Throughout our study, users often looked for information about an organization’s work in their community. If a non-profit or charity works in various locations—across the state, country, or globe—this information should be provided on the website, because people will seek it out. For example, The Friends Program, a New Hampshire based organization, clearly stated the nine counties they served on their About Us page.
The Friends Program’s About Us page included a list of the nine New Hampshire counties they served, which helped users quickly understand their local presence.

Site security

In our second study, users were more cautious about submitting their personal and billing information through online forms. Before some users felt comfortable providing these details, they wanted to make sure that their information would be protected. They looked for recognizable icons or statements that explained the site’s level of security.

One user, while making a purchase on the New Hampshire Historical Society’s website, immediately noticed the GeoTrust secure site logo, which made him feel more comfortable completing the checkout process.

Users looked for evidence of site security, such as statements or familiar logos that they’d seen on other sites. It’s important to provide these details throughout the site.
and on every page of the donation and checkout processes. If users don’t feel comfortable providing sensitive information, they simply won’t.

**INFORMATION THAT PERSUADED PEOPLE TO DONATE**

Clear answers to the most frequent questions people have about an organization is vital, but additional information, such as endorsements and testimonials, can persuade users to make a contribution to a non-profit or charity. Providing this type of information allows users to better relate with the organization and the people and situations it helps.

In both studies, we asked users to research and evaluate two different charities or non-profits by using their websites and decide which charity to make a donation to. After a charity had been chosen and a donation had been made, we asked users what convinced them to donate to one charity over the other. The chart below includes the information that persuaded people to donate to an organization, along with the percentage of comments made in relation to each item.

The chart above shows the information that persuaded users to donate to a non-profit or organization, along with the percentage of comments users made related to each item: mission, goals, and objectives (49%), use of donations and contributions (19%), partners, sponsors, and endorsements (16%), local presence (9%), and case studies and stories from others (7%).

**Mission, goals, objectives, and work**

About half of the users in our study said that an organization’s mission, goals, objectives, and work was the number one influence in choosing a charity or non-profit to donate to. This wasn’t surprising, because this information is also the most requested, as shown in the previous table.

Websites that provided this information in a clear, concise, and easy-to-understand manner had an advantage over those who had convoluted or unclear goals and
objectives. The organizations that received donations during our study didn’t try to “sell” or persuade people to donate to them; they simply described what they did and how they did it in a succinct and easy to understand manner, which was enough to convince people—if they agreed with their mission—to make a donation.

For example, The Paws with a Cause homepage clearly articulated their work and purpose, which convinced one user to donate to them.

```
Our Mission
Paws With A Cause® trains Assistance Dogs nationally for people with disabilities and provides lifetime team support which encourages independence. PAWS® promotes awareness through education.

Our Vision
To encourage independence for people with disabilities by sustaining and strengthening our position as the nation’s leading provider of quality Assistance Dogs.
```

The mission and vision of Paws with a Cause was clearly explained on their homepage.

**Use of donations and contributions**

Another convincing factor was a disclosure of how the organization used donations and contributions. The organizations that provided this information on their sites helped potential donors understand where their money would go. Even if the percentage that went to the programs and initiatives was lower than users had hoped, they were still pleased to see the information and felt confident that the organization wasn’t hiding anything from them.

Financial documents, such as annual reports, also convinced users that the organization was credible and worthy of a donation. Most users didn’t open or view the documents, but they were reassured by the availability of them on an organization’s site. For example, one user, who was researching The Brain Aneurysm Foundation, noticed the availability of different financial documents, and said, “This is an organization that has nothing to hide.”

**Partners, sponsors, and endorsements**

Users were often drawn to a non-profit or charity’s partners, sponsors, and endorsements. If an organization partnered with a non-profit, charity, or corporation, users were interested in how the parties worked together.

Users also gravitated towards sponsors and endorsements. In particular, endorsements or high ratings from watchdog organizations, such as Charity Navigator, Independent Charities of America, and the American Institute of Philanthropy, communicated to users that the organization was credible and reliable. Credibility was a key consideration in order to feel comfortable donating, as mentioned in the previous section.

For example, The Conservation Fund mentioned their endorsements and ratings from Charity Navigator (four stars) and the American Institute of Philanthropy (A+ rating) on their homepage.
Third-party endorsements persuaded users to donate to The Conservation Fund.

Other types of endorsements, especially from high profile celebrities, athletes, or other public figures, convinced users that the organization was doing something right. Otherwise, well-known individuals wouldn’t support them.

**Local presence**

Some users in our study were convinced to donate to an organization because they worked in or reached out to their local community. This meant a lot to users, and many gave one charity higher preference over another if they had a presence in a local town, state, or region. In fact, one user decided to donate to one charity over another because they worked only in the United States; the other charity worked around the globe. People wanted to better their surroundings and were more apt to donate to a charity that would do so. This, in turn, made them feel like they had a part in the improvement.

**Case studies and stories from others**

Finally, users were very interested in learning how people had benefited or situations had improved from the work of the charity. Testimonials, personal stories, case studies, and facts and figures convinced users to make a contribution.

Testimonials and personal stories were especially powerful, because users were able to associate a face or place with the work of an organization. If non-profits and charities simply describe what they do and how they do it, it can only be so informative and convincing, but stories allow users to identify with a situation, person, or problem to understand the organization’s impact.

In one test session, a user was convinced he was going to donate to the first charity he looked at, but he decided to check out the second charity just to see what they were about. On the second charity’s website, he found a list of people who were waiting for help from the organization. Each person provided a story about help from the organization was needed. After reading this information, the user decided to make a donation to the charity, because he felt he could “see” where his money was going.
The National Education for Assistance Dog Services (NEADS) website included stories about individuals waiting for assistance from the organization, which persuaded one user to donate to them.

**BIGGEST DETERRENTS WHEN CONSIDERING A DONATION**

While providing key information and other convincing facts and stories improves the chance that an individual will donate to non-profit or charity, there are many things sites can do to turn people away.
Users in our study were easily turned off or bothered by many things on non-profit and charity websites. Throughout the study, we captured the things people referred to as annoying, confusing, or frustrating. The list below highlights the top things people mentioned and the percentage of comments related to each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnoff</th>
<th>% of comments related to this item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of or unclear information about mission, goals, objectives, or work</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of or unclear explanation of how donations were used</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to quickly find where to donate</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy or cluttered homepage or site</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to read text</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission, goals, objectives, or work that clashed with personal beliefs</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strange or unexpected interactions</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-party payment applications</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusing terms</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated news or events</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of or unclear information about mission, goals, objectives, or work

One of the most frequently mentioned turnoffs was a lack of or unclear description of an organization’s mission, goals, objectives, or work. This was the most important piece of information users wanted to know about a charity before they made a donation. Failure to provide this information in a clear and easy to understand manner—or at all—immediately turned off users in our study. In fact, at least three times during the study, users decided to donate to a different charity because they couldn’t find or understand what the charity they were currently looking at did.

Inability to quickly find where to donate

Another aggravation commonly mentioned in our study was the inability to quickly locate where to initiate a donation. When users were ready to make a donation, they wanted to do so quickly and easily. Unfortunately, several sites in our study were designed in a way that required users to hunt for a link to donate. Users were highly frustrated by this, but if they were truly interested in donating to the organization, they put in the effort to locate the link.

For example, when users wanted to donate to Defenders of Wildlife, they had trouble locating a link to do so. The link to donate on the homepage was part of an image of a wolf, and an additional link was hidden within the Take Action category.
Users who wanted to donate to Defenders of Wildlife had trouble finding a way to do so. Banner blindness often makes people less likely to see items that are highly formatted or that are part of large graphics.

Lack of or unclear explanation of how donations were used

A lack of or unclear explanation of how donations were used was another frequent annoyance in our study. As mentioned above, this was the second most important piece of information users wanted to know before making a donation. Some sites provided this information, but others did not. Regardless, users hunted for it, and those who found it were pleased that the organization disclosed the information. Those who couldn’t find the information at all were aggravated and thought the organization was inefficient or hiding something.

One user was comparing two sites: The Brain Aneurysm Foundation and the Lymphoma Research Foundation. At the beginning of the task, she stated that she wanted to donate to the Lymphoma Research Foundation, but she decided to research both organizations before she making a donation. During her research, she was able to locate information about the percentage of donations that went towards programs on The Brain Aneurysm Foundation’s website, but she couldn’t locate this information on the Lymphoma Research Foundation’s website. Because of this, she changed her mind and donated to The Brain Aneurysm Foundation instead.

Busy or cluttered homepage or site

Users were often turned off by sites that seemed overwhelming or overloaded with information, especially homepages. When users went to an organization’s homepage, they wanted to know—very quickly—what the non-profit or charity did and how they did it. When they were bombarded with lots of unrelated information, they became frustrated and looked desperately for basic information about the organization.
Several users in our study mentioned that they were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of content on a homepage or throughout an organization’s site, especially when they didn’t have a good grasp on the organization’s objectives.

**Hard to read text**

Some users in our study commented on hard to read text, which was either too small, had poor color contrast with the background color, or both. This frustrated users, because it required them to put in extra effort to read information on an organization’s site.

One user had to get far too close to the monitor to read the text on The Corcoran Gallery of Art’s website and eventually moved on to another site, because it was too difficult to read. The text was too small, and there wasn’t enough contrast between the font color and the background color.

Hard to read text was a turn off to users.

**Mission, goals, objectives, or work that clashed with personal beliefs**

Users were turned off by organizations that completed work that didn’t mesh with their own beliefs. However, users were even more turned off when organizations weren’t straightforward about their views.

For example, one user realized an organization had specific religious beliefs after he had been researching on their site for over five minutes. He quickly became irritated, because the organization wasn’t upfront about it. If organizations have very specific views, these views should be clearly communicated on the homepage and throughout the site.

**Strange or unexpected interactions**

Users were turned off by strange or unexpected interactions. These interactions tripped users up. Some users mentioned the non-standard designs, but others simply moved to another part of the site—or to a different site altogether.

When one user navigated to the *Where We Work* category on the Sustainable Conservation site, she was brought to Google Maps. She quickly closed the browser window and said, “Maps and I don’t get along.” This strange interaction annoyed her.
An unexpected interaction annoyed one user trying to understand where Sustainable Conservation worked.

Third-party payment applications

Users were consistently confused when they were sent to a third-party payment application, such as Google Checkout, PayPal, or GiveDirect, to complete their donation. The users in our study weren’t expecting to use these tools and questioned why the charity or non-profit would ask them to do so. The users who completed their transactions using these tools eventually did so successfully, but some struggled with unfamiliar interactions, performance issues, and login problems.

Of the 39 donation processes tested in our research, 69% of sites used a third-party payment application and 31% processed donations internally.
The chart above shows how organizations included in our study processed donations; 27 organizations (69%) used a third-party payment process and 12 (31%) processed donations internally.

Confusing terms

Some websites we tested used made-up terms or names for their programs or initiatives, which confused users—especially when they didn’t have a firm grasp on what the organization did or how they did it. When reading through information on a non-profit or charity site, users often paused when they read unfamiliar terms. Unusual terms and made-up words required extra processing and took away from people’s ability to fully understand what the organization did.

For example, the “I Have a Dream” Foundation referred to the individuals they helped as “dreamers,” which confused users who were trying to understand what the organization did.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHNICITIES</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of the term “Dreamers” on the “I Have a Dream” Foundation’s site confused users.

Unrelated news or events

Another confusion that occurred during our study was a lack of association between featured news stories or events and the organization featuring them. Several users
in our study navigated to a news article on a non-profit or charity website and were puzzled when the content they found wasn’t clearly tied to the organization.

**SITE ELEMENTS THAT BUILT TRUST**

In our second study, we asked users to evaluate various organizations and determine whether or not they were trustworthy. Throughout the task, users made comments related to the trustworthiness of organizations based on their sites. The chart below includes the site elements that affected users’ trust in an organization, along with the percentage of comments made in relation to each item.

The chart above shows the site elements that built trust among users, along with the percentage of comments users made related to each item: partners, sponsors, and endorsements (24%), visual design (24%), writing (24%), amount of information (18%), accreditations/awards (6%), and contact information (7%).

**Partners, sponsors, and endorsements**

Not surprisingly, users were quick to trust organizations that featured third-party endorsements or well-known partners and sponsors on their sites. This was also information that persuaded users to donate to an organization, as previously discussed.

**Visual design**

When users visited a website, they made split-second decisions and judgments about the organization based on what they initially saw. Having a professionally-designed website immediately built trust among site visitors. Organizations that had a clean design and an organized layout were considered to be more trustworthy than those that had a haphazardly designed site.
For example, those that visited the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) were immediately turned off by the cluttered homepage and rotating images. By contrast, those that visited the Global Links site said the streamlined homepage and organized layout made them think the organization was trustworthy.

Image 1 of 2: The rotating images and cluttered homepage made users leery to trust ICARDA.
The clutter-free and clean layout of the Global Links homepage increased users trust in the organization.

A clean, organized, and clutter-free visual design and layout is critical for non-profit and charity websites. Additionally, creating a consistent experience between the main site and affiliate or chapter sites is equally important. Users were often confused when they navigated to an affiliate or chapter site from the organization’s main site, because the look and feel of the two sites was wildly different. Some questioned if they were on the right site and if the affiliate or chapter was trustworthy.

For example, a user who navigated to a Manchester, New Hampshire Boys & Girls Clubs of America site were confused, because the look and feel wasn’t consistent with the organization’s main site.
Image 1 of 2: The national Boys & Girls Clubs of America website had a distinct look and feel.
The look and feel of the Manchester, New Hampshire Boys & Girls Clubs of America site was completely different than the national site.
Writing

Users commented on various aspects of the writing on non-profit and charity websites, from the clarity and precision of the writing to grammar and punctuation. Organizations should focus on the provided content and ensure it’s clearly—and correctly—written. How your content is written is just as important as what your content says.

Users were annoyed by the vagueness of the Acumen Fund’s About Us page, and they wanted to know what they actually did. The use of fluffy language and unclear terms made users doubt the organization’s trustworthiness.

Using Patient Capital to Build Transformative Businesses

Acumen Fund is a non-profit global venture fund that uses entrepreneurial approaches to solve the problems of global poverty. We seek to prove that small amounts of philanthropic capital, combined with large doses of business acumen, can build thriving enterprises that serve vast numbers of the poor. Our investments focus on delivering affordable, critical goods and services—like health, water, housing and energy—through innovative, market-oriented approaches.

The use of vague phrases, such as “patient capital” made users doubt the credibility and trustworthiness of the Acumen Fund.

Amount of information

Users judged organizations based on the amount of information available on their sites. Those that provided ample information about their work and mission were trusted more than organizations that provided very few details.

For example, users commented that the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust was trustworthy because they provided lots of information on their site. One user said, “The depth of content makes me think they are trustworthy.”

Accreditations/awards

Some users based their assessment of an organization’s trustworthiness on the accreditations and awards it had received. If non-profits and charities have received awards or recognition, they should be highlighted on the site.

For example, users commented on the banner of accreditations displayed on the bottom of the Global Links homepage. It featured various awards, endorsements, and recognition the organization had received, which impressed users.

The number of awards, endorsements, and recognitions made users think that Global Links was a trustworthy organization.

Contact information

Contact information that was readily accessible increased users’ trustworthiness in an organization. Users wanted to know that the organization had a physical location, along with a phone number and an email address that they could use if they had to get in touch with someone.
HOMEPAGES LEFT MUCH TO BE DESIRED

The homepage is a critical part of non-profit and charity websites, because it must provide essential details to potential donors. Based on our research, we’ve identified four elements that must be provided on every non-profit or charity homepage, including:

- Explicit information about the organization’s work and mission
- Details about how donations are used
- A clear link to “donate”
- Applicable third-party endorsements (and ratings, if applicable)

Unfortunately, many of the homepages we tested didn’t include these vital details. For example, only 47% of the homepages we tested provided explicit information about the organization’s work and mission, and only 5% provided information about how they used donations. Unfortunately, not one homepage provided both pieces of critical information.

Percentage of homepages that answered users’ top questions

Explanation of donation use only (5%)

Explicit information about the organization only (47%)

No explicit information about the organization or donation use (48%)

Homepages in our study did a poor job of answering potential donor’s top concerns: what does the organization do and how do they use donations?; 48% of homepages didn’t answer either question, 47% of homepages provided explicit information about the organization only, and only 5% explained how donations were used. Not one homepage answered both questions.

In addition to being explicit about an organization’s work and how donations are used, homepages should also present an easy-to-find link to donate. Unfortunately, over one-quarter of the homepages in our study didn’t include this critical call-to-action.
The chart above shows the percentage of homepages that contained an easy-to-find link to donate versus the percentage of homepages that didn’t; 74% of the homepages in our studies provided a clear link to donate on the homepage and 26% did not.

Finally, non-profit and charity homepages should include information about any third-party endorsements, such as Charity Navigator or the American Institute of Philanthropy, and the actual ratings received. Of the 38 homepages we evaluated, five featured an endorsement logo from at least one watchdog organization, and six featured an endorsement logo and the received rating.
The chart above shows the percentages of homepages in the study with third-party endorsement information; 27 homepages (71%) didn’t provide any third-party endorsement information, six homepages (16%) contained a third-party endorsement logo and received rating, and five homepages (13%) contained the third-party endorsement logo only.
The Usability of Additional Site Elements

In addition to the usability of organization-related content and the donation process, our second study included tasks that allowed us to research additional non-profit and charity site elements, including: information about volunteer opportunities and non-monetary donations, the e-commerce experience, and an organization’s social network presence.

Volunteer opportunities

Users were able to locate information about volunteering at an organization very quickly; on average, this task took users 58 seconds to complete. In addition to being a quick task for users to complete, they rated their overall satisfaction level with completing the task, on average, as 6.7 out of 7 (with 7 being the most positive); this rating was the highest average satisfaction rating in the study.

In general, sites provided a clear category name or link to volunteer. Provided volunteer information usually included common volunteer activities, typical volunteer hours or shifts, and/or contact information. Additionally, some sites included an online form that potential volunteers could complete, which allowed users to quickly submit their information and move the application process along.

Although users were able to quickly locate information about volunteering at an organization, it was something they said they rarely did. Users in our study usually found out about volunteer opportunities through word of mouth; most didn’t use the Web to locate this information.

Non-monetary donations

When users were asked to donate an item, such as clothing, used books, or food, they had a hard time finding information about donating the items on an organization’s site. For this task, we didn’t provide users with a specific organization or website. Instead, we asked them to use the Web to find a place to donate their non-monetary goods.

Nine out of nine users navigated to Google to locate an organization that would accept their donation. They typed in various search phrases, such as “nh animal shelters” or “clothing donation”, depending on what they wanted to donate. Users clicked on search engine results quickly and if they didn’t immediately find information on the site about how to donate the goods, they went back to their search results and clicked on another result that looked promising. They weren’t loyal to any organizations or sites; they simply wanted to find an organization that would accept their donation.

After users completed the task (or gave up, as two out of nine users did), we asked them to rate their satisfaction level with the activity; they gave it an average score of 5.3 out of 7 (with 7 being the most positive). This rating was one of the lowest average satisfaction ratings in the study.

E-commerce experience

Users consistently commented on the similarities between making a purchase through non-profit or charity sites and making a purchase on traditional e-commerce sites, such as JCPenney.com or BestBuy.com. Because of their familiarity with making online purchases, users didn’t struggle to complete purchases on non-profit or charity sites.
Thankfully, non-profit and charity organizations have many usable e-commerce sites to emulate, so they don’t have any excuse to have a poor or unusable e-commerce experience.

**Social network presence**

Some users in our second study used Facebook to evaluate and donate to non-profits and charities. Users were directed to an organization’s Facebook page to conduct research and, in one case, make a donation.

They weren’t surprised that some non-profits or charities used Facebook, but they didn’t expect the information to be more complete than what was on the organization’s official site. In fact, one user said, after reviewing People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)’s page on Facebook, “there’s probably ten times more stuff on the PETA site.”

Since users expected simplified information on Facebook, it’s important that non-profit and charities provide a clear and concise statement of what they do, as well as a link to the organization’s full site. This will allow users to get a basic understanding of the organization’s work and easily navigate to the official site if they want more information.

Instead of seeking information about the organization’s mission and goals through Facebook, users were more interested in hearing from those who had benefited from the organization’s work. They wanted social networks to provide the stories about real people who had been involved with the organization. For example, one user gravitated to stories about those who had been helped by Make-A-Wish Foundation, which were featured on the organization’s Facebook page. Non-profit and charity organization should use social networks as a way to connect with users through real stories, conversations, and interactions.

In addition to providing details and stories about the organization’s work, non-profit and charities should provide a way to donate (or initiate the donation process) through Facebook. Not one user in our study had used Facebook in the past to donate to an organization. However, one user completed a donation using Facebook during his session. He was shocked about how easy it was to do; the organization presented a streamlined form within Facebook. After completing the donation, he said he’d consider donating through Facebook again in the future. However, others adamantly stated that they’d never donate through Facebook, because they wouldn’t think to do so or would prefer to use the organization’s official site.
Design Guidelines

Homepage ........................................................................................................... 45

1. Use the homepage to address the top two questions potential donors have: what does the organization do and how do they use donations? ........................................................................................................... 45

2. Include a short, descriptive, and genuine tagline that reinforces the organization’s mission. ........................................................................................................ 52

3. Provide an easy-to-find link to donate. ........................................................... 53

4. Keep homepage content timely....................................................................... 56

5. Promote any incentives associated with donating. ....................................... 57

6. Highlight relevant organizational news or events and, if appropriate, cause-related news or events ................................................................. 58

7. If rated highly by watchdog organizations, mention it and link to the organization’s information on the watchdog site ............................................ 60

8. Feature information about volunteer opportunities and provide a link to more details ................................................................................. 61

9. Allow users to connect with chapter and affiliate websites from the homepage ........................................................................................................ 62

About the Organization ....................................................................................... 64

10. Be explicit about the organization’s work on the About Us page. ............ 64

11. Include a brief mission statement on the About Us page. Explain what the organization does, how it’s done, and why. .......................... 67

12. Clearly explain programs and initiatives ...................................................... 68

13. Consider using brief (no longer than two minutes), focused, and informative videos to communicate the organization’s work and programs. If possible, include stories about how the organization positively impacted individuals or situations ........................................................................ 70

14. Explain the organization’s position on controversial issues ...................... 72

15. Provide information about the organization’s location, along with contact information ................................................................. 73

16. Clearly state the geographic locations impacted by the organization’s work ........................................................................................................... 73

17. If necessary, explain work in various geographic locations. Some charities and non-profits work nationally or globally. If work varies across the country or globe, describe what is done in different areas ........................................................................................................ 75
18. If an interactive map is used to illustrate work in various areas, accompany it with static links. ........................................................... 76

19. Avoid routing users to third-party map applications to show where work is done. ..................................................................................... 77

20. Use real examples of people that have been helped and situations that have been improved. ..................................................................................... 77

21. If testimonials or personal stories are featured, be sure to provide enough detail so users know how the organization helped—or plans to help—the individual. ............................................................. 79

22. Consider featuring stories about those who have made contributions to the organization. .......................................................................................... 80

23. If the charity is named after someone, provide easy access to information about that individual. ............................................................................................. 81

24. Offer a full annual report. Consider offering other financial documents, such as audited financial statements, an IRS determination letter, and tax forms. .................................................. 82

Leadership, Sponsors, and Endorsements ................................... 84

25. Provide information about the organization’s leaders. Include the person’s name, title, responsibilities, and an image. .......................... 84

26. Avoid excessively touting leaders. ..................................................... 86

27. If recognizable individuals endorse an organization or have worked with the organization in the past, provide information about it. ............................................................................................. 88

28. State the names of notable endorsers in captions for their videos and photos. ............................................................................................. 89

29. Explain how corporate partners work with an organization. .............. 90

News & Events ............................................................................ 92

30. Consider featuring relevant cause-related news and events from outside sources, along with organizational news and events............. 92

31. If both organizational and cause-related news and events are provided, create a clear distinction between them. ................................. 92

32. If outside news articles are featured, ensure that they clearly relate to the organization’s work. .................................................. 94

33. Highlight news stories in the press about the organization and link to the full story. ................................................................. 95

34. Clearly differentiate between press releases and news. ..................... 95

35. Allow users to search for events in their area. .............................. 96
Chapters and Affiliates ................................................................. 97

36. Feature timely and relevant information on chapter and affiliate websites. ................................................................. 97

37. Keep the look and feel of chapter and affiliate websites consistent with the main website. ......................................................... 97

38. Be sure the information on the main site is consistent with the information on chapter or affiliate sites................................. 104

39. Provide a way for users to easily get back to the main website from a chapter or affiliate website................................. 105

40. Allow users to make or initiate donations on chapter or affiliate sites.................................................................................. 107

41. Consider integrating the donation process from a chapter or affiliate site with the main site, and direct the donation to the appropriate chapter or affiliate organization by default................. 108

Social Media and Interaction .................................................. 110

42. Provide links to the organization’s presence on social networks. .... 110

43. On Facebook, default to information about the organization. ........ 111

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45. Post stories and examples to connect with users. ......................... 114

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47. Include details for those interested in making tax deductions....... 117

48. Provide contact information specifically for donations. ................. 118

Monetary Donations ...................................................................... 118

49. Tell people exactly how donations are used, providing details about the percentage of donations that goes to programs and services versus administrative and overhead costs......................... 118

50. Make it easy for people to donate to the organization on every page of the site.................................................................. 120

51. Use the labels "Donate" or "Donate Now" to describe the link that launches the donation process. .............................................. 122

52. Avoid being too pushy when asking for donations....................... 123

53. Don’t bombard users with donation requests via pop-ups........ 123
54. Tell the stories of individuals or situations that will be helped with donations

55. Provide information for those interested in making larger donations through planned giving or a charitable gift annuity

56. Provide a list of needed items

57. Explain donation requirements

58. State when and where users can drop off items. Provide or link to directions and a map

Attracting Volunteers

59. Provide a list of common volunteer duties, along with typical hours or shifts

60. If volunteers must meet specific requirements, list them

61. Collect volunteer information via a form. Allow users to choose their volunteer interests on the form

62. Provide contact information along with the form

63. Tell users when to expect a response on the form and the confirmation page

The Donation Process

General Guidelines

64. Answer people’s questions before they initiate the donation process

65. Make registration optional

66. Explain why someone would want to register on the site

67. Provide login fields for returning donors

68. Create a donation process that makes sense to users. Consider the transaction and the required information to craft an appropriate donation process

69. Show the steps in the donation process, and allow users to go back to previous steps

70. Streamline the donation process

71. Avoid routing users to a third-party application as the only option to complete the donation process

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1. **Use the homepage to address the top two questions potential donors have: what does the organization do and how do they use donations?**

Users in our study were interested in two things when they considered donating to a charity or non-profit: what did the organization do and how did they use donations? Unfortunately, many users struggled to find this information on the websites we tested, and very few found this information on an organization’s homepage.

The Interfaith Alliance homepage didn’t clearly communicate what the organization did and how they used donations. One user, while looking at the homepage, said, “I’d like to know a little bit about this site. Who’s behind it? Where does the money go? I can’t really tell from the homepage.”

There was a lot of information on the Interfaith Alliance homepage, but key information—such as who they were and how they used donations—wasn’t available.
Heifer International did a poor job communicating what they did on their homepage. There wasn’t a clear description of the charity’s objectives, recent work, or mission. Users had to dig deep into the site to get an understanding of what the charity did.

The Heifer International homepage didn’t include details about what they did.

The Bread for the World homepage failed to communicate their mission and what they did. One user, while viewing the homepage, became frustrated because he couldn’t quickly understand what the charity did. He said, “It just has some current events on it [the homepage] that don’t seem related to figuring out what these guys do. I’m having a hard time figuring out what it is they are trying to do.”
The Bread for the World Institute didn’t clearly state who they were and what they did on the homepage.
Some charity and non-profit sites clearly conveyed their goals and objectives on the homepage, which helped users quickly understand their work.

Users who visited the Paws with a Cause website could immediately tell what the organization did from the homepage, because details of their mission and vision were available. One user, after reading through Our Mission on the homepage, said, “It’s not an overwhelming first page. No bright, flashy colors. But there it is, right at the top—Our Mission. The length or history is right on the homepage: 30 years. And you can see who they are affiliated with on the bottom [of the page].”

Users were drawn to the Paws with a Cause homepage, because it clearly stated its mission and vision.

Another website that clearly stated its goals and objectives on the homepage was the Seacoast Family Food Pantry. Users who visited this site quickly understood the organization’s purpose by reading the short mission statement on their homepage.
The Seacoast Family Food Pantry homepage included their mission statement and details about their programs.

It’s extremely important to communicate the mission and objectives on the homepage. By not doing so, users are forced to search within the site to find the answer, and many users are too impatient or not motivated to do so.

Simply having a mission statement or information about the organization on the homepage wasn’t enough. It needed to be clear, concise, and informative. For example, The Brain Aneurysm Foundation’s homepage included a mission statement that clearly articulated the organization’s purpose. One user read the statement and said, “A nice, simple explanation of what they are doing... right here.” The mission statement was prioritized and placed above the fold, and users were able to locate the information quickly.
The Brain Aneurysm Foundation included a sentence at the top of their homepage that encapsulated the organization’s work and purpose.

In contrast, the Global Links homepage included information about their efforts, but it was long-winded and vague. One user, while trying to understand what the organization did, navigated to a third party endorsement site, GreatNonprofits.org, to get additional details. After reading through the information provided on GreatNonprofits.org, he said, “The description on here is better than what is on their site. This [GreatNonprofits.org] seems to tell you more about what they are about. Their website is more a feel-good story versus what they actually do.” Additionally, the information was placed underneath a large homepage image and below the fold, which made it difficult for users to quickly locate.
Image 1 of 2: The Global Links homepage included information about the organization, but it was vague and long-winded.

Image 2 of 2: One user found the Global Links description on GreatNonprofits.org more informative than the organization’s official website.
In addition to clearly stating the goals and mission on the homepage, it’s also important to provide information about how donations are used to improve the organization’s work or programs. Over half of the users in our studies (57%) were interested in how their money would help drive and execute an organization’s visions before they felt comfortable making a donation.

The Action Against Hunger homepage included a pie chart with this information. One user was interested in how this charity used his donation. The user saw the chart and said, “They give 89 cents of every dollar to the program. I like when they are right up front about it.”

The Action Against Hunger homepage explained that they spent 89% of their donations on their programs.

The Adoption Exchange provided information about how they used donations by stating on their homepage that “For every dollar raised 85 percent goes directly to program services.” Although the information was provided, it was easy to miss because it was presented in small text and placed above the Donate button. It would have been better to emphasize this fact by presenting it on its own.

2. Include a short, descriptive, and genuine tagline that reinforces the organization’s mission.

Some sites in our studies included a tagline to communicate the organization’s mission and goals. The most effective taglines were those that were clear, concise, and meaningful. For example, the North Shore Animal League’s tagline was “World’s Largest No-Kill Animal Rescue and Adoption Organization.” This tagline communicated the organization’s main purposes, and it also provided information about the organization’s credibility as the largest of its kind in the world.
The North Shore Animal League’s website included a mission statement that described the organization’s purpose and credibility in less than ten words.

In contrast, Sustainable Conservation provided a vague and meaningless tagline, “Because the environment is everyone’s business.” The tagline didn’t provide any details about the organization’s mission or purpose. Users assumed they worked towards improving the environment, but the organization’s specific goals or work weren’t part of the tagline.

Sustainable Conservation included a short tagline, but it was vague and didn’t provide any specific information about the organization’s mission.

Global Links also had a vague tagline, “Sharing surplus, saving lives.” One user read the tagline and said, “I would say, surplus of what?” The tagline could have been much more descriptive by the addition of one word, medical, so it read as “Sharing medical surplus, saving lives.”

Global Links’ vague mission statement didn’t clearly state the organization’s purpose.

3. **Provide an easy-to-find link to donate.**

   If users are interested in donating to an organization, they should be able to navigate to the donation process directly from the homepage. Although most users took some time to explore an organization’s site—particularly the About Us section—before committing to a donation, it’s important to provide this option on the homepage—especially for those who have already done their research or have made a donation in the past. Of the homepages we tested, 74% provided a link to donate directly on the homepage.

   The link to donate on The Action Against Hunger site stood out, because it was a bright orange button and placed towards the top of the page. Unfortunately, if users were running at a low screen resolution, the button wasn’t visible; users had to scroll horizontally to see it.
The Action Against Hunger homepage had a bold, bright Donate Now button, which was immediately noticed by users.

The Defenders of Wildlife homepage provided a link to donate on the homepage, but it was associated with an image of a coyote and was easily overlooked. In addition, the link to donate in the main menu was hidden in the Take Action category, so it was challenging for users to quickly find a way to donate to the organization directly from the homepage.
It is important to remember that “easy-to-find” doesn’t equate to “big and colorful.” In fact, users often overlook page elements that appear overly promotional or that employ overly fancy formatting because they have been trained to associate such design techniques with advertising. Selective attention is well-documented in psychology as a human defense mechanism against information overload, and this particular form of selective attention is called banner blindness. Banner blindness is very strong on the Web because of the excessive amount of advertising found on many sites. Even though many non-profit sites may eschew commercial elements, banner blindness acts before users have had the opportunity to read or analyze those page elements that they unconsciously ignore.

The link to donate to the charity from the homepage was overlooked by some users, because it blended in with the image of the wolf.
A link to donate to the North Shore Animal League was placed prominently on the site’s homepage and was paired with a short statement that summarized their differentiating work: “Support our No-kill Mission.” The button used for the Donate call to action was yellow, which made it stand out from the other elements on the homepage. Additionally, a yellow Donate tab was placed in the navigation, which created visual consistency.

The Donate button on the North Shore Animal League’s homepage stood out from other homepage elements.

4. **Keep homepage content timely.**

When users visited a charity or non-profit website, they were often drawn to content that was related to the season or a current event. Highlighting timely events, holidays, and occasions will keep the homepage fresh and make users confident that the organization is aware of current issues.⁴

Additionally, a current event might already be driving traffic to a site, so fresh content will appeal to those users who have come to the site based on a prompt, reminder, or event. For example, a disaster might prompt users to donate to the American Red Cross or UNICEF and Breast Cancer Awareness Month may trigger users to donate to the American Cancer Society.

⁴ See also our design gallery with more tips on recognizing holidays and special occasions on websites. [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/holidays](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/holidays)
The Child Advocates homepage featured a call to action to sponsor a child for the holidays. This promotion was featured on the site during the winter holiday season in the United States, which is a popular time to donate.

The Child Advocates homepage included a link to sponsor an abused child during the holiday season.

An Alzheimer’s Association homepage promotion focused on organization-related news: National Alzheimer’s Disease Awareness Month. Throughout the month of November, the homepage featured a reminder and a call to action to make a donation or create a tribute in honor of a caregiver.

The Alzheimer’s Association homepage reminded visitors that November was National Alzheimer’s Disease Awareness Month.

5. **Promote any incentives associated with donating.**

Users were interested in anything additional they’d receive from an organization if they provided a monetary or non-monetary donation. If an organization provides any incentives—such as a free item, voucher, or a matching donation—this should be promoted on the homepage.

Kars4Kids.org promoted a free vacation voucher for those who donated a car to the organization. The promotion and a link to additional details were displayed on the homepage.
Kars4Kids.org promoted a free vacation voucher on their homepage for those who donated a car.

If an organization matches donations, this should be emphasized on the homepage, because it can convince donors that their contribution will go even further. The Habitat for Humanity homepage promoted end-of-year donations. The homepage emphasized the U.S. year-end tax deadline, December 31, and promised to match donations up to $100,000.

The Habitat for Humanity homepage provided a tax deadline reminder for those who wanted to donate before the year’s end.

6. Highlight relevant organizational news or events and, if appropriate, cause-related news or events.

Users were interested in charity news and upcoming events, so dedicating a portion of the homepage to this information will allow users to quickly access the desired content. In our studies, 74% of the homepages we tested featured news and/or events on the homepage, and several users navigated to more information by clicking on the featured story or event links.

Although most of the sites we tested provided links to news and events from the homepage, the types of news and events varied. Some sites featured cause-related news and events, while others featured news and press releases about their own organization. Both types of news and events were acceptable to users, as long as there was a strong correlation between the information in the news article or event description and the organization.
The Wildlife Alliance listed news and events on their homepage, which were related to their initiatives. Although the section was titled *News & Events*, only news items were featured.

**News & Events**

- **Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center gives baby elephant new lease on life**
  In March 2007, a team of Wildlife Alliance rangers heard reports of a baby elephant wandering through the forest. ...It is thought that the elephant had his leg caught in a snare trap designed for a creature of lesser stature....

- **Thailand Calls for Wildlife Trade Enforcement**
  Thailand is training more than 200 Bangkok airport personnel to assist in the recovery of wildlife trafficked through the international gateway.

- **Laos Emerges as Key Source in Asia’s Illicit Wildlife Trade**
  Long an isolated land with abundant forests and biodiversity, Laos is rapidly developing as China and other Asian nations exploit its resources.

The Wildlife Alliance homepage featured news articles related to their mission and objectives.

The Habitat for Humanity homepage provided links to recent news that related to their work, which some users found interesting. However, these “news” articles actually linked to press releases published by the company, so a stronger differentiation between news and press releases would have been helpful.

**From the News Desk**

- **Habitat for Humanity celebrates 20 years of spring break youth volunteerism**
- **Lowe’s renews commitment to Habitat with pledge of $20 million**
- **Habitat for Humanity kicks off Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project 2009 in Asia**
- **More News...**

The Habitat for Humanity featured a list of recent press releases (labeled as *News items*) on their homepage.

Users appreciated when some types of organizations, such as organizations focused on diseases and disorders, informed them about cause-related developments and research. For example, the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis homepage provided links to recent news and developments about the disease, which was highly relevant content for site visitors. The homepage also featured upcoming events that may have interested site visitors and those involved with the charity.
The Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis featured links to the latest news and developments about multiple sclerosis, along with recent updates about upcoming events.

For additional guidelines related to new and events, see the section on News and Events, beginning on page 92.

7. If rated highly by watchdog organizations, mention it and link to the organization’s information on the watchdog site.

Users wanted to be sure they were donating to a worthy cause. Some organizations, such as Charity Navigator, Independent Charities of America, and the American Institute of Philanthropy, evaluated and provided ratings of non-profit and charity organizations. If a charity has received a high rating from any of these organizations, it should be clearly visible on the homepage.

Users tried to locate third-party endorsements while they were researching various organizations, particularly for organizations they weren’t familiar with. One user was trying to determine if the Specialist School and Academies Trust was a trustworthy organization. While browsing their site, he said, “I was looking to see if there were any referrals. BBB [Better Business Bureau] stuff. Sometimes I’ve seen that on other websites just to authenticate what people are looking at.”

Another user, while reviewing The Conservation Fund’s homepage, noticed the high ratings given to them by Charity Navigator and the American Institute of Philanthropy, and said, “They are tracked by two watchdog organizations, so they must be efficient with their objectives.”
The Conservation Fund mentioned their endorsements and ratings from Charity Navigator (four stars) and the American Institute of Philanthropy (A+ rating) on their homepage. However, the site only included a link to the full review on Charity Navigator, not the American Institute of Philanthropy.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters homepage included three watchdog endorsement logos: one from Charity Navigator, one from the Better Business Bureau (BBB), and another from Independent Charities of America. Of the three, the Charity Navigator and Independent Charities of America logos contained the actual rating.

Big Brothers Big Sisters displayed three logos from watchdog organizations on their homepage.

In addition to featuring the endorsements and ratings, non-profit and charity sites should provide links to the full review on the watchdog sites. Some users in our study were interested in finding out more about an organization from an unbiased third party, especially those organizations that they weren't familiar with.

One user, while reviewing the Acumen Fund’s site, noticed the Charity Navigator endorsement on their About Us page. She clicked on the endorsement graphic and was brought to the full review on Charity Navigator’s site. She skimmed the review and noticed that they received a rating of four out of four stars, which convinced her that they were a trustworthy organization.

Even users who do not click through will often feel that a third-party rating or endorsement is more credible if it’s “proven” by a link to supporting information on the third party’s own site.

8. Feature information about volunteer opportunities and provide a link to more details.

Users who visit non-profit or charity websites may be interested in spending their time helping the organization on a regular basis or at a special event, particularly if they feel a strong connection with the organization.
Volunteering opportunities should be featured on the homepage so interested users can be routed to the appropriate area of the site. Instead of simply including a link or category labeled Volunteer, feature information about volunteer opportunities with a link to more details.

The Habitat for Humanity homepage featured a brief description about a “global adventure” with the organization, along with a link to view more details and a schedule of upcoming volunteer opportunities.

The Habitat for Humanity’s homepage included information about upcoming volunteering opportunities and a link to more information.

The Goodwill homepage featured a woman who was volunteering at the organization. From the homepage, users could navigate to additional details about her involvement with the organization, along with a link to search for local volunteer opportunities.

The Goodwill homepage featured one of their volunteers, which linked to her full story and information for those interested in volunteering.

For more information and guidelines about attracting volunteers, see the Attracting Volunteers section, beginning on page 130.

9. **Allow users to connect with chapter and affiliate websites from the homepage.**

Users in our study were consistently interested in learning if and how an organization was involved in their local community. Many people used the main website as a launching point to get to their local chapter’s website.

The American Red Cross provided users with a way to search for their local chapter right on the homepage. Users appreciated this, because they could get quickly get to their local organization’s website. One user said, “The national site will direct you to the local chapter, which is geared towards what’s going on locally.”
The national American Red Cross site provided a way for users to search for a local chapter from the homepage, and the tool was also available from any page within the site.

The Boys & Girls club offered a link to *Find a Club* in their main navigation, which one user found helpful. She said, “I like the *Find a Club Near You*, because if you are looking for one, it’s nice to have the option right here.”

Users could search for a local Boys & Girls Club by clicking on the *Find a Club Near You* link on the homepage. The *Find a Club* menu item in the main navigation was also available throughout the site.

For additional guidelines related to chapter and affiliate sites, see the section on Chapters and Affiliates, beginning on page 97.

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5 For additional information and guidelines about improving the usability of store finders and locators, please see our separate report on this topic. [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/locators](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/locators)
About the Organization

10. **Be explicit about the organization’s work on the About Us page.**

Users wanted to know details about an organization and what they did before they felt comfortable making a donation. In our study, this was the number one piece of information that users wanted to know about a charity or non-profit. Unfortunately, users had difficulty finding this information. All users reviewed the homepage and navigated to the About Us area of non-profit and charity websites in search of this information. Some sites vaguely alluded to these details, which frustrated users who were interested in learning more about the charities in question.

Users who visited the Environmental Defense Fund site failed to fully understand what the organization did. Each user spent at least 10 minutes on the site and eventually moved on, because the site didn’t explicitly state the organization’s mission, goals, and programs.

An Uncommon Approach: Four Core Strategies

Founded in 1967 as the Environmental Defence Fund, we tackle the most serious environmental problems with:

- **Strong science**
- **Innovative markets**
- **Corporate partnerships**
- **Effective laws and policy**

See our [history of results](#).

Left: Board chairman Nick Nicholas, president Fred Krupp and executive director David Yarnold

The main focus of the About Us page on the Environmental Defense Fund website was an image of three executives and links to broad terms such as **Strong Science** and **Innovative Markets**.

Another user was researching the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and was impressed by the brevity and concision of the Who We Are page. She said, “It’s really short and sweet. There’s not a lot. You can find what you want without needing to read through lots and lots.”
The Who We Are page on the Boys & Girls Clubs of America was short and to the point.

The same user later researched Big Brothers Big Sisters and struggled to understand what they did based on their About Us section. She said, “I want to know their mission and specifically what they do. They have what they say they do, but what exactly is it that they do?”

The Who We Are page provided history information, but doesn’t explicitly state what Big Brothers Big Sisters does.

Another user was reviewing the Our aim and objectives page on the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust website and became annoyed because they used vague terms to describe their work. She said, “Some of it starts to be like business-speak. ‘To build and embed’ ... that doesn’t really mean much to me.”
Our aim and objectives

Our aim
We aim to give practical support to transforming education by building and enabling a world-class network of innovative, high-performing schools in partnership with business and the wider community.

Our objectives
We have six objectives that set out our ambition.

1. To develop the specialist schools and academies system.
2. To develop specialisms and curriculum.
3. To build and embed capacity in schools to raise achievement.
4. To develop specialist school and academy partnerships with business and the community.
5. To develop leadership and foster innovation.
6. To develop our organisation to achieve results.

The page describing Specialist Schools and Academies Trust used vague terms that one user couldn’t identify with.

Some sites provided information about the charity’s goals, objectives, and programs, but users had to dig to locate it.

One user had trouble understanding what the “I Have A Dream” Foundation did, even after exploring their site for almost five minutes. She couldn’t find information about the ages and grade levels of the children the charity helped. Eventually, she came across a chart on the Our Program page, which provided this information to her in a clear and easy-to-understand manner. After viewing the chart, she said, “So it looks like they help mostly middle and high school students. This is really interesting.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicities</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 College</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Dreamer Snapshot chart helped one user quickly understand the grades the program targeted, but it was buried.
11. **Include a brief mission statement on the About Us page. Explain what the organization does, how it’s done, and why.**

Users in our study wanted to read a clear and distinct mission statement about the organization. They weren’t interested in reading paragraphs and pages of information to get the gist of an organization’s purpose.

The Mission America Coalition communicated their mission with a succinct sentence on the homepage, and one user commented, “The statement ‘the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole nation’ is short and to the point, so I don’t have to read pages of something to get the idea of what they are really about. It puts it in a nutshell what they’re about.”

Another user said, “They are definitely an evangelical organization, but it doesn’t sound like they try to force you to choose one thing or another.”

“*The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole Nation - and to the World.*”

This mission statement on the Mission America Coalition website clearly communicated the organization’s objective.

The mission statement on the “I Have A Dream” Foundation website wasn’t clear enough for one user, who struggled to understand what grade level the charity targeted. This information was available on the *Our Program* page, which she eventually found, but she expected to find this information in the mission statement. After she read the mission statement, she said, “I haven’t figured out if this program focuses on elementary school or exactly what group, so I’m going to keep reading.”

**OUR MISSION**

The “I Have A Dream” Foundation empowers children in low-income communities to achieve higher education and fulfill their leadership potential by providing them with guaranteed tuition support and equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and habits they need to gain entry to higher education and succeed in college and beyond.

By helping our Dreamers gain access to college, we are putting our Dreamers on a different academic and life trajectory, while having a broader impact on the students’ families and the generations that follow.

The mission statement on the “I Have A Dream” foundation didn’t state what grade level or age brackets they work with.

The Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis defined each piece of the mission statement on their *Philosophy* page. Users quickly skimmed this page and got a good feel for what the organization did based on their philosophy description. Hyperlinked words in the description allowed users to get more information.
The format of the *Philosophy* page on the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis site was easy to scan, and provided clear information about what they did and how they did it.

### 12. Clearly explain programs and initiatives.

Users who researched non-profits and charities became quickly frustrated when organizations didn’t clearly explain what they were working on. Some sites were clear and others were vague. Users appreciated when sites precisely explained the projects, programs, and initiatives they were currently working on.

For example, one user was interested in volunteering at The Friends Program, so she navigated to their *Programs* page to learn more about what they did. The *Programs* page included a list of five initiatives, along with links to view additional details about each. Although the programs were explained in simple terms, the use of acronyms (RSVP and FGP) wasn’t necessary. To their credit, they defined the acronyms before they were used. The user appreciated the simple breakdown of their work, and she decided to fill out the volunteer application.
The Friends Program website included a breakdown of their five programs, along with a link to view additional details about each.

Other organizations weren’t explicit about their programs and initiatives, which aggravated users who were trying to understand what they did. For example, the Acumen Fund used vague language, such as “patient capital,” and didn’t provide any specific information about their programs or initiatives on the site. Instead, they talked about an “entrepreneurial approach” to their work, which turned off one user.

Users couldn’t understand the programs or initiatives Acumen Fund was involved with.
13. Consider using brief (no longer than two minutes), focused, and informative videos to communicate the organization’s work and programs. If possible, include stories about how the organization positively impacted individuals or situations.

Some sites we tested used videos to communicate their mission and beliefs, which were helpful to some users. Users didn’t look for videos, but if they came across them while browsing, most watched them. The most effective videos were those that included stories about how the organization had positively impacted individuals or situations. Other impactful videos were those that featured well-known or recognizable individuals, as well as videos that included footage of the actual people or families that had benefited from the organization's work.

Two users played a video featured on the homepage of the Children’s Scholarship Fund, which covered the charity’s objectives and featured some high profile endorsements. After watching the video, one user said, “You don’t have to go searching for anything. It tells me why I should donate to them. It’s just a short video, and they have answered most of my questions without having to read anything on their website. And then on top of that, they have well-known people on there: Barbara Bush, Colin Powell, Oprah, Rudy Giuliani… I mean, names you know and trust, and you don’t think it’s a fake organization. The video speaks words.”

Another user, after watching the same video, said, “There were a lot of recognizable people in the video, which I would think helps people know that there is a lot of backing to this project—that’s it’s going to be legitimate. You had some big names talking—political, entertainment…”

This video, featured on the homepage of the Children’s Scholarship Fund, gave users a good understanding of the charity’s goals, objectives, and programs.

For more information and examples about featuring high profile individuals on an organization’s website, see Guideline 27 on page 88.
Other videos were used to communicate how various charity programs worked, which also tested well with users. One user watched two videos on the National Education for Assistive Dog Services (NEADS) site to get a better understanding of how their services were run. After watching a video on the Canines for Combat Veterans page, he said, “I like how they have a lot of information in the video about: the training process, how they match dogs to individuals, the types of breeds they use, and the role of the animal itself.”

The video featured a soldier who had benefited from the charity’s work, and it told the story of his injuries, recovery, and use of an assistive dog. In our study, we found that stories of how individuals or situations had benefited from a charity were very powerful. For additional information and examples, see page 77.

The video on the Canines for Combat Veterans page on the National Education for Assistive Dog Services covered the basics about how assistive dogs were trained and used, which helped one user get a better grasp of this charity’s role.

Other sites included videos that didn’t have a clear objective, which confused users. The Defenders of Wildlife website launched a video on the homepage with a story about Chhouk, an elephant missing a foot, as he walked through the jungle. Two people were immediately drawn to the video, and said, “There’s a video here showing an elephant walking through the jungle. It looks like they are doing a live TV show.” Another user said, “I’m immediately drawn to this video... Oh, this elephant doesn’t have a foot.”

Although the video grabbed the users’ attention, it was too long and irrelevant, and both users failed to understand the significance of the video or what was trying to be communicated. The video played for several minutes, and a clear point or objective was missing. Also, it launched when the homepage loaded, and there were no video controls, so users had to navigate away from the homepage when they were no longer interested in the video.
This video launched automatically when users navigated to the Wildlife Alliance site, and no video controls were provided. The point of the video was unclear to users.

14. **Explain the organization’s position on controversial issues.**

Some subjects that charities support are controversial, such as environmental issues, religious views, and medical research and treatments. If a charity encompasses a controversial issue, the organization’s position should be clearly explained. As one user said, “I don’t want to donate to something that has views that are contradictory of my own.”

One user, while viewing cap and trade information on the Environmental Defense Fund website was frustrated, because he didn’t understand where the organization stood on the issue. He said, “OK, so they are focused on cap and trade. It’s extremely controversial and complicated. They are just sort of explaining stuff, but I don’t know what their position is. The tone of everything I’m seeing here would lead me to believe that they are supporting it, but I’m not sure.”
One user had trouble understanding the Environmental Defense Fund’s stance on cap and trade.

15. **Provide information about the organization’s location, along with contact information.**

Users were curious about where an organization was based, and they often had more trust in organizations that were upfront about their location. Users wanted to ensure that any contributions were going to a reputable organization with a physical location. Non-profit and charity sites should state where the organization is located and provide basic contact information, including a physical address, a phone number, and an email address.

16. **Clearly state the geographic locations impacted by the organization’s work.**

Users were not only interested in an organization’s mission and programs, but they also wanted to know where the work was done. Many were interested in local and national programs and were less interested in international initiatives.

One user, while viewing the *Places We Protect* page on The Conservation Fund site, became frustrated when he couldn’t find the specific areas where they worked. He said, “It says ‘from Alaska to the Adirondacks.’ That’s just a generic explanation.”
From sea to shining sea, America’s land legacy represents the natural, cultural and historic landscapes that shape us as a people and define us as a nation. They are the face of our country. From wilderness in Alaska to working forests in the Adirondacks to parks and community green space everywhere, these special places embody America’s heritage, spirit and character.

The generic language used on The Conservation Fund website wasn’t helpful when users were trying to understand where the charity worked.

Another user was researching the New Hampshire Food Bank and was trying to understand what geographic areas the organization served. He navigated to the Registered Agencies page, which had a lot of text and large images of food. He skimmed the page but couldn’t gather where the food was distributed. He said, “There’s a lot of food here, but I’m not sure where it goes.”

Reducing Poverty through our Registered Agencies

The New Hampshire Food Bank is the only nonprofit food distribution center in the state. Committed to providing nutritious food for anyone in need, everyday we solicit, obtain and distribute donated and purchased foods to our 366** registered agencies who in turn provide this food to 71,417 hungry people in New Hampshire. Our registered agencies consist of soup kitchens, food pantries, homeless shelters, and elderly and children’s programs throughout the state. They serve as the front line in the fight against hunger and provide a wide range of services, but a common goal exists between them all: to provide wholesome, nutritious meals to those in need.

Food received into the warehouse is weighed, examined closely for any contamination, and put onto our warehouse shelves for our agencies to pick back for their clients. Much of this food is distributed to our registered agencies at no cost. These items include produce, dairy, bottled water, most other drinks, breads and pastries. Because these items are perishable, it is critical that they reach those in need in a timely manner. These items represent important portions of a nutritious, balanced diet, and as such we want to encourage our agencies to provide these items frequently to their clients.

When an agency becomes registered with us, they agree to pay a Shared Maintenance Fee of eighteen cents per pound or less, in many situations. This fee helps us to recover transportation costs for donated goods. Some of these transportation costs include operating our own fleet of trucks and the transportation of national donations received through our affiliate, Feeding America. Our warehouse trucks deliver to agencies too far away to travel to the Food Bank, to senior centers, the inner city, and low-income sites on the east and west side of Manchester.

From this page, users couldn’t understand what the New Hampshire Food Bank did with all the food they collected.
Another local organization, The Friends Program, explicitly stated the New Hampshire counties they served on their About Us page, which helped users immediately understand where they worked.

The About Us page listed the nine New Hampshire counties they served.

17. If necessary, explain work in various geographic locations. Some charities and non-profits work nationally or globally. If work varies across the country or globe, describe what is done in different areas.

The Action Against Hunger site broke their work down by geographic areas, and provided detailed information about the work in each area. One user, while viewing what the charity did, arrived on this area of the site and said, “It’s helpful that they break down the areas by geographical location and what they do.”

The Action Against Hunger website broke their work down by geographical areas.
18. **If an interactive map is used to illustrate work in various areas, accompany it with static links.**

Some sites included interactive maps as a way for users to explore work being done in various areas; users could click on or place their mouse on different parts of the map to see additional information about what was being done in the area. If an interactive map is offered, be sure to accompany it with static links for those who don’t want to use the interactive features as well as for those who can’t access them. (For example, those not using a mouse, those accessing the site from a small-screen device, or those using an assistive device, such as a screen reader or screen magnifier.) Using maps also requires that users are familiar with geography and know the location of states, countries, or even counties. Don’t assume users know what they’re looking for on a map.

The Conservation Fund used a map of the United States to explain and illustrate their programs in various areas across the country. Users could use their mouse to hover over an area, such the West, and a small pop-up would appear with a brief summary of the work being done in that area, along with a link for additional details. Although this interactive map contained helpful information about their programs, it would have been best to accompany it with static links to meet the needs of all users.

An interactive map on The Conservation Fund’s site allowed users to hover over various areas of the United States to learn about specific initiatives in different regions. The site should also have provided static links to meet the needs of all users, however.
19. **Avoid routing users to third-party map applications to show where work is done.**

Users weren’t interested in being routed to a third-party map application to understand where an organization had impact.

One user, while navigating the Sustainable Conservation site, was brought to Google Maps when she clicked the *Where We Work* category in the site’s main navigation. She had trouble interacting with the map, quickly closed it, and said: “Maps and I don’t get along.”

![Google Maps](image)

Users were brought to Google maps when they clicked on the *Where We Work* category within the Sustainable Conservation main navigation.

20. **Use real examples of people that have been helped and situations that have been improved.**

Most users in our study gravitated towards stories of real people or situations that had benefited from the charity or non-profit they were researching. If an organization has case studies or testimonials, they should be used as a vehicle to communicate objectives and programs.

One user, while reviewing the information about the UNH Foundation on the University of New Hampshire’s website, was drawn to the stories about donors and individuals that had benefited from the giving of others. In particular, she was drawn to a story about a current student who wouldn’t have had the financial support to
attend the university without a scholarship. She said, "I like the stories about the people and the donors. It feels more genuine."

True North

Johnny Rancourt ’13 is fourth-generation born and raised in Lancaster, a New Hampshire town 25 miles north of Franconia Notch. He shrugs off any mention of being too far away from anything and maintains he can drive "only" three hours to spend a day at the beach. Just starting his second year at UNH, he can’t wait to graduate, work in finance or marketing near Boston, and save enough money to be able to move back to Lancaster, a place where three generations of his family have lived on the same street. His grandfather, John Nadeau ’52, operated a dairy farm there, and his sister, Amanda ’09, teaches at the Lancaster elementary school.

Rancourt is a recipient of the Arnold P. and Della A. Hanson Endowed Scholarship, which provides students from Coos County with significant scholarship support to UNH. Only a year ago he was wondering not only where he would go to college, but how he and his parents would pay for it. His parents had already helped two older siblings through college. "And then my mother called me at work one day and told me UNH had offered me a Hanson scholarship. I couldn’t believe it," he says. "I just had no idea something like this could happen to me."

Three weeks before the move to Durham ("That trip to Durham was the first time I

A story about a scholarship recipient at the University of New Hampshire encouraged one user to donate to the scholarship fund.

Another user, while viewing the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis website, came across an image of a couple, which was accompanied by a brief story about how the charity helped them. She said, "There’s a photo of a couple here on the page, and it has her name and a little bit of her story. I like that. It makes it seem more personalized."
The brief story of how the Accelerated Cure for Multiple Sclerosis charity helped this couple resonated with one user.

21. **If testimonials or personal stories are featured, be sure to provide enough detail so users know how the organization helped—or plans to help—the individual.**

   Although users gravitated towards stories about an organization’s work, they wanted enough details to understand the impact. Sites should include enough details so users can gather a good sense of the organization’s contribution.

One user, while viewing the testimonials on the Big Brothers Big Sisters site, got annoyed because he didn’t think there was enough detail. He said, “I need to know how these people made a difference and what they did. They didn’t provide me with any detail. They talk about the success in mentoring, but don’t seem to tell me what exactly the person did to help.”
One user was annoyed with the Real Life Stories page on the Big Brothers Big Sisters website, because he didn’t think they had enough detail about how the mentors helped the children.

22. **Consider featuring stories about those who have made contributions to the organization.**

   Not only were users interested in stories about how organizations helped individuals and situations, they also gravitated to stories about those who had contributed to an organization.

   For example, one user was drawn to a story about a woman who made a donation to the UNH Foundation at the University of New Hampshire. This gave her a sense of other individuals who also supported the university, as well as their reasons for giving.
A woman who donated to the University of New Hampshire was featured on
their site. This gave users a sense of who donated and why they did so.

23. **If the charity is named after someone, provide easy access to
information about that individual.**

One of the charities we tested was named after an individual, Nancy Davis.
The users who visited this site immediately wanted to know who Nancy Davis
was and why the charity was named after her. This wasn’t evident from the
homepage, and one user said, “I’ve never heard of this, so I’m interested in
finding out who Nancy Davis is and what the purpose of the organization is.”

Another user, after reading the paragraph about their mission on the About Us
page, said, “I don’t even know who Nancy Davis is. I’m looking for
somewhere where it shows a bio of Nancy Davis. Not knowing who she is
doesn’t hold that much significance to me. If it’s named after someone, I
want to know why.”

One user was frustrated that the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis’
mission on the About page didn’t explain who Nancy Davis was and why the
charity was named after her.
Another organization, Team Hoyt, was named after a father and son who worked together to help “physically disabled individuals become active members of the community.” Information about the two men, along with the evolution of the organization, was available on the About Team Hoyt page. One user became wrapped up in the story and said, “This is just amazing.”

The About Team Hoyt page on the Team Hoyt website included details about the individuals the organization was named after.

24. **Offer a full annual report. Consider offering other financial documents, such as audited financial statements, an IRS determination letter, and tax forms.**

Some users in our study were interested in viewing annual reports, because they were curious about how organizations used their money. Additionally, some users wanted to see annual reports to determine an organization’s credibility. If an annual report wasn’t available or was difficult to locate, some users immediately dismissed an organization. Having this type of official document openly available was a great credibility booster, even to users who didn’t read through it in its entirety.

One user opened the annual report on the Big Brothers Big Sisters site and quickly scrolled through the document. He said, “I like to see the different places where the money they take in gets spent and what exactly it gets spent on.”

Users made various comments about the availability of annual reports and other financial documents. For example, before making a purchase from the New Hampshire Historical Society, one user noticed that the site included audited financial
statements. He said, “I’m trying to evaluate the organization. Audited financial documents are always good. Auditors have to sign off on them.”

Another user commented on the financial information on the Lymphoma Research Foundation website. Although she didn’t view each document, the availability of them convinced her that the organization was trustworthy. She said, “All the tax returns, the audited financial statements, the annual reports. This is very good. This is an organization that has nothing to hide.”

The availability of financial documents on the Lymphoma Research Foundation’s site convinced one user that they were a credible organization.

The same user noticed the 501(c)(3) IRS determination letter on The Brain Aneurysm Foundation website. She was impressed by the availability of this document, and said, “You know what makes me think this organization is trustworthy? The IRS determination letter. That’s very good. It tells me that it’s a non-profit.”

6 For additional information and guidelines about presenting annual reports and financial data on websites, see our report on Investor Relations. http://www.nngroup.com/reports/ir
Leadership, Sponsors, and Endorsements

25. Provide information about the organization’s leaders. Include the person’s name, title, responsibilities, and an image.

In our study, users were interested in the people who led or were involved with the organization, and many navigated to this information looking for people they might recognize.

One user, while reviewing the Governance page on the American Red Cross website, thought the information about and images of those holding the leadership positions at the organization were helpful. He said, “It shows the individual, not just a name and a bio. At least you are putting a face to a name.”

Leadership
The Chairman of the Board and the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) are significant leaders of the American Red Cross. The Chairman leads the Board of Governors in the governance and oversight of the organization. The President and CEO executes Red Cross strategies and leads the operations and business activities of the Red Cross.

Bonnie McElveen-Hunter was appointed as Chairman of the American Red Cross on June 17, 2004. Ms. McElveen-Hunter is the former U.S. Ambassador to Finland (2001 – 2003) and the CEO and owner of Pace Communications, Inc., the largest private custom publishing company in the United States.

- Board Chairman Position Description [PDF]

Gail J. McGovern was named President and CEO of the American Red Cross on April 8, 2008. Gail, who held top management positions at AT&T Corporation and Fidelity Investments, has experience running large organizations in competitive industries, and a track record for improving business performance and service delivery to the public.

- President and CEO Position Description [PDF]
- President and CEO Evaluation [PDF]

The American Red Cross website provided ample information about their leaders.

One user questioned the importance of the list of the national board of advisors on the Children’s Scholarship Fund website, because there was no explanation about what the people did. She said, “All these people in charge ... not very useful. President of Intellectual Ventures? What does that mean? Are these the people who decide who gets the scholarships?”
Users weren’t sure what the people listed on the National Board of Advisors page did for the Children’s Scholarship Fund.

Users had little patience for organizations that didn’t explicitly state who lead the organization. Vague references to individuals made users think that the organization had something to hide. (This is also why photos of the leadership are important—it doesn’t matter so much how they look, but it does matter that they are willing to show their face.)

Two users, while reviewing the Acumen Fund website, read a sentence that alluded to “three individual philanthropists” who founded the organization in 2001. They
were annoyed by the elusiveness of the site. One user said, “Three individuals... OK, who? If they’re not comfortable sharing their names, I’m not interested? Another said, “‘Three individual philanthropists’ is vague.”

The Acumen Fund alluded to “three individual philanthropists” who incorporated the organization in 2001, but users thought it was too vague.

26. **Avoid excessively touting leaders.**

Users were turned off by organizations that bragged about or provided too much information about their leaders. Many felt that the site should be focused on the goals and mission of the organization, not on the top-level management and leaders.

One user, while viewing the Boys & Girls Club of America website, was turned off by the long descriptions on the *Executive Bios* page. He said, “No matter how great the person’s resume is, that one person isn’t the organization—it’s a bunch of people working together to accomplish a goal. It’s more about the people underneath the executives, rather than the executives, most of the time.”
The long, drawn-out description of the leaders on Boys & Girls Club of America site was off-putting to users.
27. If recognizable individuals endorse an organization or have worked with the organization in the past, provide information about it.

When users evaluated the credibility of an organization, they were often drawn to people who endorsed or had worked with the charity in the past. Some sites mentioned this information, which caught the attention of users.

One user, while exploring the Boys & Girls Club of America, noticed that well-known individuals had gone through the program. He said, “Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, Martin Sheen, Neil Diamond … it’s a good list. While I don’t know any of them personally, they seem like outstanding individuals. It’s a pretty impressive list, which leads me to believe that this is a good organization that does good things for people. They are people who—as an outsider—I respect.”

The Alumni Pride page listed famous individuals that had been through the program, which impressed users.

Another user, while browsing the Habitat for Humanity site, navigated to the Jimmy Carter and Habitat for Humanity page, and skimmed some of the content. He was able to gather information about the various places the organization worked from the description, and said, “I’m just reading through his connection to Habitat. And this
gives me a brief history of what he's done. It shows a lot of places around the world that they've helped out with.”

**Jimmy Carter and Habitat for Humanity**

As president of the United States, Jimmy Carter was deeply committed to social justice and basic human rights. He and his wife Rosalynn left the White House in search of meaningful ways to contribute in these areas. In addition to promoting peace and human rights through the nonprofit Carter Center in Atlanta, they led the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project for Habitat for Humanity International one week each year.

**Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project**

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter's involvement with Habitat for Humanity International began in 1984 when the former president led a work group to New York City to help renovate a six-story building with 19 families in need of decent, affordable shelter. That experience planted the seed, and the Carter Work Project has been an internationally recognized event of HFHI ever since.

Each year, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter give a week of their time—along with their construction skills—to build homes and raise awareness of the critical need for affordable housing. The Carter Work Project is held at a different location each year, and attracts volunteers from around the world.

- **CWP 2009** Mekong region: Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Yunnan Province in China – November 2009
- **CWP 2008** took place along the Gulf Coast (Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas) – May 11-16, 2003
- **CWP 2007** took place in Los Angeles, Calif. – Oct. 28-Nov 2, 2007
- **CWP 2004** took place in two sites in Mexico—Puebla and Veracruz—Oct. 24-29, 2004,
- The Carters and more than 4,000 volunteers built 92 houses in Anniston, Ala., and LaGrange and Valdosta, Ga., during **CWP 2003**.
- The **2002 CWP** took place in Africa. One thousand houses were built in 18 countries, with the final 100 houses constructed in a five-day build in Durban, South Africa.
- In **2001**, CWP built 136 houses at six sites across South Korea with more than 9,000 volunteers participating from around the world.
- Other recent CWP builds have taken place in New York-Florida-Georgia (2000, 157 houses), the Philippines (1998, 203 houses) and Houston, Texas (1998, 100 houses).

The first half of the *Jimmy Carter and Habitat for Humanity* page highlighted areas where he had worked for the organization, which helped one user understand the breadth of the charity's services.

28. **State the names of notable endorsers in captions for their videos and photos.**

   Even if somebody is famous, don’t assume that everybody can recognize them, particularly if they have become older since they were most prominent or if they appear briefly in a video clip.

   See the screenshots under Guideline 13 (starting on page 70) for examples of well-captioned videos.

The above screenshot of the *Jimmy Carter and Habitat for Humanity* page was an exception to this guideline. Since the entire page was about Jimmy Carter, and his
name was used for the first two words of the headline immediately above the photo, there was no need to caption this photo. However, if the photo was of Carter building a house, as shown in the image below, a caption was still beneficial, because his face wasn’t as recognizable in the photo.

### Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project

Habitat's Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project is an annual, internationally-recognized week of building that brings attention to the need for simple, decent and affordable housing in partnership with low-income families. The Carter Work Project is held at a different location each year and attracts volunteers from around the world.

**Championing basic human rights**
As president of the United States, Jimmy Carter was deeply committed to social justice and basic human rights. He and his wife Rosalynn left the White House in search of meaningful ways to contribute in these areas.

In addition to promoting peace and human rights through the nonprofit Carter Center in Atlanta, each year the Carters give a week of their time—and their construction skills—to build homes and raise awareness of the critical need for affordable housing.

#### 2010 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project

The 27th annual Carter Work Project was held from Oct. 4-8, 2010, to coincide with the United Nation's World Habitat Day.

The Carters worked with volunteers in Washington, D.C.; Baltimore and Annapolis, Md.; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn.; and Birmingham, Ala. In each location, volunteers built new houses or improved existing homes.

An image of Jimmy Carter building a home with his wife, Rosalyn, was featured on the Habitat for Humanity site. Although the page title included their names, it was still beneficial to include the caption, because it was difficult to discern their recognizable faces in the image.

#### 29. Explain how corporate partners work with an organization.

Users were interested in the companies that partnered with charities and non-profits and how they worked together. Sites should provide this information in the About Us section.

One user, while viewing the Environmental Defense Fund website, wasn’t sure how the corporations listed on the Corporate Partnerships page worked with the charity. He said, “Their website is not clear. What is their tie to these companies? I give them money, but how do they help the environment by engaging corporations? It sounds like a lobbying effort to me.”

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7 For additional information and guidelines about improving the About Us area of your site, please see our separate report on this topic. [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/about](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/about)
One user didn’t understand the Environmental Defense Fund’s ties to the companies listed on the Corporate Partnerships page of their site.
News & Events

30. **Consider featuring relevant cause-related news and events from outside sources, along with organizational news and events.**

When it was appropriate, some organizations provided relevant cause-related news and events from outside sources in addition to their own organizational news and events. This was acceptable to users, especially when they had a strong interest or attachment to the cause.

For example, some users donated to health-related causes, because the condition or disease was prevalent in their immediate or extended families. These users were interested in news related to the cause, such as recent developments or research. One user had an immediate family member pass away from Parkinson’s disease, so she was interested in cause-related news, which was featured on the Michael J. Fox’s Foundation for Parkinson’s Research site.

31. **If both organizational and cause-related news and events are provided, create a clear distinction between them.**

Sites that offer both industry and organizational news must clearly differentiate between the two news types so users can quickly understand where they will go if they want to view additional details.

For example, the Susan B. Komen for the Cure homepage featured two types of news: *Breast Cancer News*, which included general news headlines about breast cancer, and *Komen News*, which included headlines about the organization. Both types of news headlines linked to full details. Each news type was placed on its own clearly-labeled tab within the *Latest Headlines* area of the homepage.
The Susan B. Komen for the Cure website clearly differentiated between the offered news by organizing them into two types: general news about breast cancer and news about the organization.

Some sites provided both industry and organizational news, but the sites didn’t clearly differentiate between the two.

For example, the Adoption Exchange included an area on the homepage called featured story, which included adoption stories. The first story linked to an outside source, The Denver Post, and the second linked to a story on their own site. The stories should have been organized so users clearly knew where they were navigating to: an outside source or within the site. The labels for the two areas could have been Our Adoption Stories and In the News.

There wasn’t a clear differentiation between stories featured in the news and the organization’s own stories.

It is important that users know the difference between general news about a cause, which may not be directly related to an organization, and news from the organization itself.
32. **If outside news articles are featured, ensure that they clearly relate to the organization's work.**

If news stories from outside sources are featured, ensure that they clearly relate to the organization’s work. In some instances, users skimmed an article and questioned how it related to the charity. An article’s lack of relevance or clear association with the organization confused users and made them question what the charity actually did.8

One user, while viewing the Wildlife Alliance website, navigated to a news article with a title that suggested that the organization worked to turn “poachers into gamekeepers.” As she read through the article, she became confused and said, “It’s not really saying what they were going to do to change poachers, so that’s confusing.” The news article she read was actually a republished blog post from another organization. However, the content didn’t seem relevant to the organization and caused further confusion.

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**Turning Poachers into Gamekeepers**

**February 24, 2009**

*Originally Published by Symbiosis Expedition Planning*

February 24, 2009 blog post:

I recently visited a community deep in the Cardomom Mountains, western Cambodia that, until recently, existed to plunder the rainforest of trees and wildlife.

Chi Phat is a former logging community a 2 hour boat trip up river from the newly refurbished road linking Koh Kong to the rest of Cambodia and the largest settlement within what is now the Cardomom Mountains protected area, and it is here that the Wildlife Alliance (formerly known as Wildaid) have been driving a community based eco-tourism initiative to wean the local people off hunting endangered wildlife and chopping down the rich rainforests.

Already the commune of 4 villages and 520 families has 4 guest houses established and almost daily arrivals of Western tourists, thanks to a mention in Nick Ray’s recently published, latest edition of the Lonely Planet Cambodia.

See pictures and read more about one blogger’s expedition into the heart of the Cardamoms>>>

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A news article featured on the Wildlife Alliance website wasn’t clearly related to the organization and their work, which caused confusion for one user.

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8 For additional information and guidelines about improving the PR area of your site, please see our separate report on this topic. [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/pr](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/pr)
33. **Highlight news stories in the press about the organization and link to the full story.**

Users were interested in what the press was saying about an organization, and they often found positive news stories from outside sources to be more compelling and credible than an organization’s own touting.

One user, while reviewing the Child Advocates homepage, noticed a link to a featured story in the *Houston Press* that named the organization the “best charity” in Houston. The user navigated to the full story on the news website and immediately decided to donate to the organization. After she made the donation, she said, “Best charity from the *Houston Press*; that sort of sealed the deal for me. When you give to a charity, you want to make sure it’s worthy.”

![CAI NAMED BEST CHARITY BY HOUSTON PRESS BEST OF HOUSTON 2010!](image)

Wow! What an honor for our staff, volunteers and many supporters - thank you!

The Child Advocates homepage featured a link to a story in the *Houston Press* that named the organization the “best charity” in Houston.

34. **Clearly differentiate between press releases and news.**

Many charities and non-profits made the mistake of labeling press releases as *News Releases* or *News*. Do not confuse press releases with external news items. Press releases are put out by the organization itself and news is what’s written by others about the organization.

If both are featured on the site, ensure there’s a clear distinction between them. Label them *Press Releases* and *In the News*. The Wildlife Alliance did this on their *Newsroom* page, which helped users quickly understand the types of stories available.

![Newsroom](image)

The Wildlife Alliance site organized news items as *Press Releases* and *In the News*. 
35. **Allow users to search for events in their area.**

Users were interested in an organization’s presence and work in their local community. When users found information about events in their area, they expressed enthusiasm about the charity’s existence in their local community. Providing an event calendar is another way for organizations to show their presence in local communities.

Event calendars can be a good addition for sites with local events in many different communities, showing the breadth of work the organization does and the variety of locations where that work is done.

One user, while viewing the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis site, came across a listing of events that included two in Boston, Massachusetts. She said, “This shows me that the organization is doing a lot. And I even see places that aren’t far from where I live. That would be important to me.”

### Upcoming Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location Description</th>
<th>Event Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/20/2009</td>
<td>Boston, MA: The Accelerated Cure Project 113th Annual Boston Marathon Fundraiser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/02/2009</td>
<td>Boston, MA: A Wine Tasting Evening to Benefit the Accelerated Cure Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/01/2009</td>
<td>Bay Area, CA: Tyler Hamilton Foundation MS Global 2009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of upcoming events on the Accelerated Cure for Multiple Sclerosis website told users that they worked in different areas, which was important to some users.

The American Cancer Society allowed users to search for local events by providing a ZIP Code. The list of upcoming events demonstrated their presence in local communities.

![Image of Event List](Image)

The American Cancer Society allowed users to search for local events by entering a ZIP Code.
Chapters and Affiliates

36. **Feature timely and relevant information on chapter and affiliate websites.**

Users expected to see information related to their community when they navigated to local chapter sites, so it’s important to provide this type of content on these sites. Two users navigated to the local American Red Cross website from the national site. Both were interested in information about local events and topics. One user noticed that the local American Red Cross site included information relevant to his community, “It explains how to deal with problems that are common to our area, such as downed lines and frozen pipes.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frozen Pipes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- If you have no heat, let the cold water drip from faucets. This helps prevent freezing pipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If you turn on a faucet and only a trickle comes out, suspect a frozen pipe. Likely places where pipes pipes become frozen include pipes running against exterior walls or where you water service enters your house through the foundation. Keep the faucet open. As you treat the frozen pipe and the frozen area begins to melt, the water will begin to flow through the frozen area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Down Wires and Trees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Stay away from downed wires - treat all wires as live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Call your utility company if you have a downed wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Watch for falling limbs and trees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Users appreciated the content on their local American Red Cross site, because it was geared towards them.

37. **Keep the look and feel of chapter and affiliate websites consistent with the main website.**

Throughout the study, users navigated to chapter or affiliate sites from the main site. Unfortunately, most chapter sites didn’t have the same look and feel as the main site, which confused users.

The Boys & Girls Club of America’s local chapter websites had a drastically different look and feel as compared to the national site. The national site had a distinct design, which incorporated a defined color scheme and an organized approach to presenting information. The local chapter website failed to follow this design approach and used different colors and a disorganized manner of displaying information. Aside from a similar page header, it was difficult to tell—at first glance—that these two sites represented the same organization.
The national Boys & Girls Clubs of America website had a distinct look and feel.
The look and feel of the Manchester, New Hampshire Boys & Girls Clubs of America site was completely different than the national site.
Habitat for Humanity did a mediocre job of keeping the look and feel of their chapter sites consistent with the main site. The color schemes were similar, but the navigation was inconsistent and the search box wasn’t available on the local site.

Image 1 of 2: The national Habitat for Humanity site had a defined look and feel.
The Southeast New Hampshire Habitat for Humanity website used some of the same colors as the main site, but the navigation was inconsistent, the search box wasn’t available, and the page layout was different.

Easter Seals did a decent job of keeping the look and feel of their affiliate sites consistent with the main site. Each affiliate site was designed within a standard template, which retained the same look and feel as their main site; both the main site and the affiliate sites used the same overall page layout, color scheme, and navigational elements (search bar, global navigation, and footer navigation). The
biggest inconsistency between the main site and the affiliate sites was the main navigation. However, the main navigation across all affiliate sites was consistent, creating a cohesive experience for those who navigated to various affiliate sites.

Image 1 of 2: The main Easter Seals site had a distinct look and feel, which was translated to their affiliate sites.
The look and feel of the New York Easter Seals affiliate included the same overall page layout, color scheme, and navigational elements (the search bar, global navigation, and footer navigation). The New York site’s main navigation didn’t match the national site, but the main navigation was consistent across all affiliate sites.
38. **Be sure the information on the main site is consistent with the information on chapter or affiliate sites.**

A consistent look and feel is important, but having consistent information across sites is imperative.

One user, while researching upcoming local blood drives sponsored by American Red Cross, was frustrated when he didn’t see any in his area on the national site. When he navigated to the local site to research the same topic, he was inundated with details about local blood drives. The user was frustrated, and said, “Between the national site and this one [the local site], they aren’t connected. The national one doesn’t show any blood drives, but this shows that there are plenty of blood drives around.”

![Image 1 of 2: The American Red Cross national site didn’t return any results when a user searched for blood drives in his area.](image1)

![Image 2 of 2: When the same user checked a local American Red Cross website for blood drives, he received details for over 30 upcoming blood drives in his area.](image2)
39. **Provide a way for users to easily get back to the main website from a chapter or affiliate website.**

Throughout our study, users struggled to get back to the main site once they had navigated to a chapter site. It’s critical that chapter and affiliate websites include a clearly visible link back to the main site. If it’s too difficult to get back to the main site, users won’t make the effort and may also give up on making a donation to the charity.

The website for the Northern New England Goodwill included a link back to the main site on the bottom of every page. It would have been better to place the link in a more noticeable area, such as within the main site navigation. However, simply having a link back to the main site from a chapter site was good; most chapter and affiliate sites in our study failed to do so.

A link to the main Goodwill website was available in the footer navigation on every page of the Northern New England Goodwill chapter website.

One user in our study navigated to the Great Bay American Red Cross site from the national site, but couldn’t find a way to get back to the national site when he wanted to. He tried clicking on the logo in the upper left hand corner of the site, but it brought him back to the local site’s homepage. He became frustrated, and said, “I’m just trying to get to where I was before. It’d be nice to be able to get back to the main site from here.”
There wasn’t any way to get back to the national American Red Cross site from the Great Bay chapter site, which frustrated users.
40. **Allow users to make or initiate donations on chapter or affiliate sites.**

Two users in our study preferred to use a local site instead of the national site to make a donation, because they didn’t trust that the national organization would get the money to the local organization in a timely manner—or at all.

One user wanted to direct his donation to a local chapter and said, “Red Cross is a reputable organization, but nothing is really telling me that it is going to make it to the local chapter.” Another said, “I’d rather donate to the local chapter than depend on the national one to funnel it down to the local chapter.”

For this reason, it’s important to allow users to access the donation process from the local website. For example, the Maine chapter of Make-A-Wish provided a *Donate Now!* button on their site, which allowed users to make a direct donation to the local chapter.

![Make-A-Wish Maine Chapter](makeawish_maine.jpg)

Users could make a donation to the Maine Make-A-Wish chapter from the Maine chapter’s website.
41. Consider integrating the donation process from a chapter or affiliate site with the main site, and direct the donation to the appropriate chapter or affiliate organization by default.

Some users in our study wanted to make a donation to a local organization through the local chapter’s website. Organizations should provide this option, but they should consider routing all donations through the main website. This creates a consistent donation process across the affiliated sites. Additionally, it reduces the amount of site maintenance for chapters and affiliates; instead of requiring each chapter to be responsible for its own donation process, a single person at the main office can monitor and maintain a single donation process for all affiliated sites.

The Maine Chapter of Make-A-Wish provided a link for users to donate. If users clicked the link, they were brought to the donation process on the main website. From there, users could select a chapter to direct a donation towards, but it would have been better if the referring chapter was selected by default.

When users chose to donate from a Make-A-Wish affiliate site, they were routed to the donation process on the main site where they could choose a local chapter to direct their donation towards. It would have been better if the site had chosen the appropriate chapter, by default, based on the chapter site that the user initiated the donation from.

Some sites offered both options: to donate through the local site or to donate through the main site. This was unnecessary and confusing.
If users chose to make a donation from the Southeast New Hampshire Habitat for Humanity website, there were two links to donate: one that routed users to the national Habitat for Humanity site and another that routed people to PayPal. This was unnecessary and very confusing for users. One user noticed this, and said, “On this one, they have two places to donate... One brings you to the PayPal page and the other brings you to a page on the site. It’s confusing. Why not just have one [link to donate] instead of taking up space on your site with two?”

There were two links to the donation process on a local Habitat for Humanity site; one brought users to PayPal and the other brought users to the donation process on the main site. This was unnecessary and confusing.
Social Media and Interaction

42. **Provide links to the organization’s presence on social networks.**

Social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr, are powerful tools that can help organizations reinforce their mission and objectives. If an organization has a presence on social networks, provide links to those pages on the official website.

The Interfaith Alliance offered links to various social tools throughout the site. One user navigated to the YouTube site by clicking a link on the About Us page, and she watched a video that reinforced some of the organization’s objectives. After watching the video, she said, “The message they are trying to get across is keeping religion separate from the government... that’s what it seems they are trying to say.”

Information found by following links to popular social network tools helped one user better understand the Interfaith Alliance’s objectives.

Another user, while exploring The Brain Aneurysm Foundation homepage, commented on the recognizable icons to connect with the organization on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. She said, “I like that it’s connected to larger online communities here. It’s right there on the homepage.”

The Brain Aneurysm Foundation’s homepage included links to friend, fan, or follow them on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The American Red Cross site included a page that highlighted the various social networks where the organization had a presence. Although one user didn’t navigate to any of the tools, he thought it was nice to have the option. He said, “You can connect with them on the most popular online websites, which is nice.”
43. **On Facebook, default to information about the organization.**

When users navigated to an organization’s page on Facebook, they wanted to be presented with information about the organization. They didn’t want to be immediately prompted to make a donation, sign up for a newsletter, or provide personal information.

The Volunteers of America’s Facebook page defaulted to the eNewsletter tab, which contained open fields for **First Name**, **Last Name**, and **Email**. This was immediately
off-putting to users, especially those who weren’t familiar with the organization.
Although there was a brief description underneath the logo on the left hand side of
the page, it would have been best to default to the Info tab, the Our Services tab, or
the Wall.

Image 1 of 2: The Volunteers of America’s Facebook page defaulted to the
eNewsletter tab, which prompted users to sign up to receive email from the
organization.
Instead of defaulting to the eNewsletter tab, the Volunteers of America’s Facebook page should have defaulted to information about the organization, which was provided on the Our Services tab.

44. **Provide information about current news, events, and initiatives.**

Social networks were a good place to inform users about what an organization had been doing or planned to do. Details about current projects, organizational news, and upcoming events or initiatives were welcomed by users.

One user, while viewing the American Red Cross page on Facebook, appreciated the tab dedicated to the various disasters they were currently working on. One user said, “I like how they tell you about recent disasters.”
A tab on the American Red Cross Facebook page was dedicated to current disaster alerts.

45. Post stories and examples to connect with users.

Users were interested in hearing about people who had benefited from the efforts of a non-profit or charity organization. Not only did they gravitate to this information on organizations’ official websites, but they were also attracted to similar content on social networks.9

One user reviewed the Make-A-Wish Facebook page and appreciated the stories and examples of how people were benefitting from and contributing to the organization. She said, “I prefer to hear about how people are benefiting from it [the organization].”

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9 For additional information and guidelines about improving notifications, messages, and alerts sent through social networks and RSS, please see our separate report on this topic. [http://www.nngroup.com/reportsSTREAMS/](http://www.nngroup.com/reportsSTREAMS/)
The Make-A-Wish Foundation used Facebook to share stories about donors and those who had benefited from the organization.

46. **Allow users to initiate or make donations from social networks.**

If users were interested in making a donation to an organization while viewing information about them on a social network, they wanted to do so quickly. Don’t force users to search for a **Donate** call to action. Make it immediately noticeable and allow users to initiate or complete the donation via the social network.

For example, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and Volunteers of America both had a **Donate** tab on their Facebook page which included a donation form. Users could fill out the form and submit a donation from Facebook. After completing a donation to PETA, one user said, “That was surprisingly easy [to make a donation] through their Facebook site.” (It took him just under two minutes to make a donation to them through Facebook, which was two minutes and 15 seconds less than the average time it took for users to make donations on organizational sites.)
Some organizations, such as PETA, had a donation form on Facebook so users could make donations through the social network.

Other organizations included a link to donate, which routed users to the official organization’s website. For example, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) included a link to donate on their Facebook page that brought users to the donation process on their main site.
Asking for Monetary and Non-monetary Donations

GENERAL GUIDELINES

47. Include details for those interested in making tax deductions.

Users were interested in how making donations would help them when filing taxes. If users are able to write-off donated goods or funds, provide details.

For example, Global Links stated that all monetary donations were tax deductible "to the fullest extent of the law" on their Financial Support page.

Global Links is a registered 501(c)3 charity. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

The Global Links site clearly stated that all donations were tax-deductible on their Financial Support page.

In addition to monetary donations, include tax deduction details for non-monetary goods. Goodwill dedicated an entire page to information about taxes and explained, in simple terms, what qualified as a tax deduction. The page said, "If you’re unsure whether your item qualifies for a tax deduction, then consider this: if you would give it to a relative or friend, then the item is most likely in good condition and is appropriate to donate." Additionally, they provided a downloadable Donation Value Guide, which classified the values of commonly donated items.

The Goodwill included tax deduction details for those who donated clothing and other goods to the organization.
48. **Provide contact information specifically for donations.**

If users have questions that aren’t answered on the site, provide a way for them to get in touch with someone at the organization. List a contact person’s name, phone number, email address, and the hours when they can be reached.

If users are unsure about what they can donate, where to bring it, or when it can be dropped off, it will be unlikely that the donation will reach the organization in need. Additionally, if users have trouble with the online donation process or have questions about how the money will be used, they likely won’t make a monetary donation.

**MONETARY DONATIONS**

49. **Tell people exactly how donations are used, providing details about the percentage of donations that goes to programs and services versus administrative and overhead costs.**

Almost every user mentioned that they wanted to know where their money would go and how it would be used. Users made many comments throughout the study, including:

- “It’s always good to know how much of your money is going to the cause as opposed to the administration.”
- “My issue with fundraising is the cut that telemarketers get.”
- “If you are going to give your money to someone, it’s nice to know that it’s going to be used efficiently and effectively.”
- “I want to know that the money is going to the cause and not to the CEO.”

Unfortunately, this information wasn’t clear on a majority of the sites we tested. The Environmental Defense Fund didn’t clearly explain how they used donations. One user, after spending ten minutes on the site looking for this information, said, “They are not getting the information across. How will they use my money? I’m not saying that their work isn’t valuable, but they don’t do a good job of explaining where your money goes.”

Some sites provided information about how they used donations in a very clear and concise manner. The Conservation Fund site included a pie chart that broke down how they used their money. One user was impressed, because they only spent 3% of their budget on fundraising and administration costs. The same user also appreciated access to other financial documents, such as audited financial statements and tax returns, from the same page.
The Conservation Fund provided a breakdown of how they used their money, which persuaded one user to donate to them.

While this pie chart was helpful, the label “Conservation Programs” was extremely vague. More detail about the programs they funded (or links to them), along with the percentage of donations allocated to each program, would have been helpful and would have made the organization’s spending more transparent.

The Defenders of Wildlife site also provided a breakdown of how they used their funds—as well as how they obtained them. Users appreciated this disclosure, because they were interested in both how the organization raised and used their money. One user said, “It’s good to know if you donate if it’s going to go to the cause or the administrative overhead. It says 90% goes to the organization.” This same user also appreciated the links to their annual report and IRS Form 990. He said, “They even have a link to their financial report, which is nice that they are upfront about where their money goes.”
Users were drawn to the pie charts that communicated how the Defenders of Wildlife earned and spent their money.

Again, in this example, the label “program and support services” is open to interpretation. A more detailed breakout of the percentage of funds allocated to each program would improve users’ trust in the validity of this diagram and the organization itself.

50. **Make it easy for people to donate to the organization on every page of the site.**

When users were ready to make a donation, they wanted to get to the donation process quickly and easily. Unfortunately, many users spent time too much time looking for a way to donate when they were ready to.

Some sites included a menu item in their main navigation that allowed users to quickly get to the donation process. This worked well, because it was available on every page of the site.

The Seacoast Family Food Pantry had a *Donate* menu item as part of their main navigation. When one user was interested in making a donation to this charity, he quickly found the menu item, and said, “They have a link to donate online right here.”
The Seacoast Family Food Pantry of New Hampshire included a *Donate* menu item in their main navigation, which was available from any page within their website.

The American Red Cross included a menu item in their main navigation labeled *Donate Money*, which was visible throughout the site. When users were ready to make a donation, they could easily find the link to do so.

The American Red Cross had a menu item named *Donate Money* in their main navigation, which was available on every page throughout the site.

Some sites provided an easy-to-find link to make a donation consistently throughout the site, which helped users when they were ready to make a donation. The link wasn’t in the main navigation, but it was in an area of the site that remained unchanged regardless of the page the user was on. One user, after deciding to donate to the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis, said, “There’s a big square at the top right that says *DONATE NOW!* so it’s pretty easy to figure out how to do that.”

The Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis site featured a large *DONATE NOW!* button consistently throughout the site.

Similarly, the American Cancer Society included a *DONATE* call to action in the upper right hand corner on every page. It wasn’t part of the main navigation, but it remained visible as users navigated throughout the site.
A DONATE call to action was available in the upper right hand corner of every page on the American Cancer Society website.

Other sites buried the donate call to action, and users had a hard time finding a way to contribute to them. To make an online donation on the National Education for Assistive Dog Services’ (NEADS) website, users had to click on an image on the Individual Contributions page to launch the donation process.

Both users who donated to this organization struggled to find a way to make a donation. Once they navigated to the correct page, users had to click an image of two golden retriever puppies to launch the donation process. After discovering this, one user said, “It doesn’t say click here, but you have to click the dog. If it said click here or something, it would have been easier.” While on the Individual Contributions page, another user said, “I’m looking to donate with a credit card, but I’m having a hard time finding it.”

In order to launch the donation process on the NEADS site, users had to navigate to the Individual Contributions page and click on the image of the dogs to the left of the text, which was unintuitive.

51. Use the labels “Donate” or “Donate Now” to describe the link that launches the donation process.

When users were ready to make a donation, they quickly scanned the page they were on and looked for a link that described the act of donating. It’s best to use clear, concise words, especially when asking for monetary donations. The words “Donate” and “Donate Now” were immediately understood by users in our study.

The “I Have A Dream” Foundation had a link to donate on the homepage, but it was labeled as CONTRIBUTE. Users noticed the orange CONTRIBUTE button right away, because it was big and bold and the first button in a series of three, but they questioned what the word contribute meant. Most assumed it was a monetary
donation, but it could also be interpreted as another type of giving, such as time or goods.

The orange button on the homepage labeled CONTRIBUTE was immediately noticed by users, but users weren’t sure what CONTRIBUTE meant.

52. **Avoid being too pushy when asking for donations.**

There is a fine line between making it easy for users to donate and being too aggressive in asking for donations. A consistent link to donate is a good idea, as noted above, but be cautious of how the link is presented.

One user, while viewing the Children’s Scholarship Fund site, noticed that the Donate menu item was larger than the rest of the menu items, which was off-putting. She said, “I notice that they have the word ‘donate’ bigger and in a different font. I don’t like it. I need to learn more before it’s in my face. I don’t want to say it’s rude, but it’s a little pushy.”

The large donate in the main navigation off-put one user, because it was larger than the other navigation items.

53. **Don’t bombard users with donation requests via pop-ups.**

Some sites used pop-ups to prompt users to make a donation. Unfortunately, this backfired, because people didn’t want to be interrupted by a pop-up soliciting them for money.

One user, while visiting the American Heart Association to purchase a product, was presented with a pop-up that asked her to donate to the organization seconds after the homepage loaded. She became annoyed, sighed, and said, “That’s obnoxious.”
Pop-ups are obnoxious.” Not only do users find pop-ups annoying and immediately dismiss them, but they are also ineffective if users have pop-up blockers installed in their browsers.

One user was prompted with a pop-up to donate to the American Heart Association. She was annoyed, because she had gone to the site to purchase a product, not to make a donation.

54. **Tell the stories of individuals or situations that will be helped with donations.**

Users were interested in how their donations would be used, and they appreciated it when sites provided stories about how the money would be spent.

Two users viewed the National Education for Assistance Dog Services’ (NEADS) website and were immediately drawn to the *Our Clients* page, which described specific individuals in need of assistive dogs. Each client story included the person’s name, why an assistive dog was needed, an image of the client, and a link to the full story. This layout allowed users to quickly scan through the list of clients and their stories, and they could easily navigate to additional details, if desired.

One user, after viewing some stories on the page, said, “This gives a personal touch, because you see the faces of people who need these animals: one is hard of hearing, one was in a car accident, one has MS... So this is a very personal page. I like that... I can see what I’ll be donating towards.”
Our Clients

We need to raise $9,500 for each NEADS Assistance Dog team to cover part of the $20,000 cost of raising and training the dog and for assisting our clients in learning to live and work with his or her new canine assistant. Please help a team (or more, if you can) by donating all or a portion of the sponsorship by clicking on the person listed below. You will learn a little about that person and how a dog will make a difference in their life.

Select a client...

Jennifer Gathercole
An assistance dog would help Jennifer work with teenage girls who have come from traumatic backgrounds and have behavioral and/or psychological disabilities.

John Archambault
John has MS and a Balance/walker dog would help him with his daily activities.

Carey Tipping
A car accident has taken away my independence because of a spinal injury. I am currently using a cane, but a dog would be much more helpful to add to my balance.

Kathleen Fortier
Born deaf, Kathleen would like a hearing dog to alert her to sounds she would otherwise not hear.

Jared Golden
Born hard of hearing and with progressive hearing loss, Jared has a 4.0 gpa at Universal Technical Inst. in Norwood MA. and is a diesel technician. He would like a hearing dog to alert him to everyday sounds and make his life easier and safer.

The Our Clients page on the National Education for Assistance Dog Services’ website described the people waiting for assistive dogs, which convinced one user to donate to the organization.
Provide information for those interested in making larger donations through planned giving or a charitable gift annuity.

Some users may be interested in researching options for making larger contributions now or in the future. It’s important to provide users with the information and tools to answer questions they may have.

For example, the Southern New Hampshire University included a list of planned gifts with supporting details for each. This allowed people to understand how they could contribute to the university in ways that would have a larger impact than a smaller monetary or non-monetary donation.

The Southern New Hampshire University included information about planned gifts for those who wanted to make high-impact contributions.
NON-MONETARY DONATIONS

56. Provide a list of needed items.

When users were interested in giving a non-monetary donation to an organization, they wanted to be sure that they were giving something that the organization needed.

One user was interested in donating pet food to an animal shelter. She couldn’t locate the types of pet food they needed on their site so she said she’d probably just “give them some money, because they know best what the animals need.”

Another user was interested in donating food to the Seacoast Family Food Pantry. He navigated to the Donate page on their site and found a list of needed items. He immediately knew what was needed and what he could donate.

![Wishlist](image)

The Seacoast Family Food Pantry included a list of acceptable items to donate to the organization.

57. Explain donation requirements.

Some organizations that collect non-monetary donations have specific requirements for donated items. For example, a food pantry may only accept non-perishable goods and a consignment shop may only accept clean clothing and accessories.

If there are specific requirements for donated goods, they should be explicitly stated. One user located the requirements for donating stuffed animals on the How to Donate page on the Stuffed Animals for Emergencies site; donated items were required to be “gently used.”
The Stuffed Animals for Emergencies site stated that donated items must be in “good condition” and free of “stains, smells or rips.”

Another user was interested in donating used books and toys to the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. She found the page on their site with basic information, but key questions, such as what could be donated and where they could be dropped off, weren’t answered. She said, “I would prefer if it had information about the items they need and any germ concerns. Also, I’m certain there are toys they can’t take, so a list of good items and perhaps a contact email address would be helpful.”

The Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center’s website didn’t provide adequate details about what could be donated to the Children’s Hospital.

58. **State when and where users can drop off items. Provide or link to directions and a map.**

If users were interested in donating items, they wanted to know where to bring the items and when they could be dropped off.

Unfortunately, some sites, such as the Salvation Army, required users to contact the organization prior to making a donation. One user wanted to donate some clothing, but he couldn’t find a way to locate the donation boxes on their site. Instead, the site told him to call someone to find out where they were. He said, “That’s annoying. If I wanted to donate, I wouldn’t, because I don’t want to call someone. I want to know where those big boxes are that I can drop stuff off at.”
The Salvation Army website informed users interested in donating items to call a toll-free number to find out where drop-off locations were or to schedule a pick up.

Other sites, such as the Seacoast Family Food Pantry, provided the location where and times when donations were accepted.

The Seacoast Family Food Pantry provided an address where donations could be dropped off, along with the times when they were accepted.
Attracting Volunteers

59. **Provide a list of common volunteer duties, along with typical hours or shifts.**

Users who were interested in volunteering wanted to know what the opportunity would entail. Details such as typical duties as well as hours or shifts when volunteers are needed should be provided on the site.

The New Hampshire Children’s Museum provided a list of common duties that volunteers could expect to do. Activities such as “assisting with off-site events and outreach programs” and “providing office support” helped set expectations with users. Additionally, the typical museum and office shifts were listed on the site so users could quickly determine whether or not volunteering at the museum would fit into their schedule.

![Volunteer]

Volunteer

Help children and their families learn and grow by:
- Aiding children in the Project Area with art and science projects
- Showing visitors how to get the most out of our exhibits
- Providing admissions and museum shop sales support
- Participating in special events
- Sharing a special hobby, craft or talent
- Assisting with on-site events and outreach programs
- Providing office support
- Assisting with general maintenance

Typical museum shifts are from 10 am - 1 pm, 11 am - 3 pm and 1-5 pm.

Most office shifts are from 10 am - 1 pm. We request a minimum commitment of four hours per month.

To volunteer, please call volunteer coordinator Gabe Doleac at (603) 742-2002 or fill out and submit this form.

The New Hampshire Children’s Museum listed typical volunteer tasks and shifts to help set expectations and weed out those who weren’t interested or available.

60. **If volunteers must meet specific requirements, list them.**

Some organizations may require volunteers to meet specific requirements. For example, volunteers may be required to be over the age of 18. Other organizations may require volunteers to be CPR certified, and others may ask volunteers to have their own transportation.

If specific requirements must be met, identify and explain them. If necessary, provide links to resources, such as CPR training courses, for those who want to volunteer but don’t yet meet requirements.

61. **Collect volunteer information via a form. Allow users to choose their volunteer interests on the form.**

To avoid spending too much time fielding phone calls and email regarding volunteer opportunities, provide an online form for those interested in volunteering. Ask only necessary information, such as a name, contact information, availability, and how
they’d like to contribute to the organization. For example, The Friends Program asked potential volunteers to select their *Areas of Interest*.

The Friends Program asked users to choose the volunteer opportunities they were interested in as part of the online form.

62. **Provide contact information along with the form.**

Although the volunteer process can be streamlined by collecting information via an online form, not all users were interested in doing so. One user, who was interested in volunteering at the New Hampshire Children’s Museum, appreciated that the site provided him with the name and phone number of the person who managed volunteers. He said, “You can call or fill out the form. Not everyone likes to fill out a form. Some people want to talk.”

The New Hampshire Children’s Museum gave interested volunteers the option to call the volunteer coordinator for more information or fill out the volunteer form.

At the very least, sites should list the name, phone number, and email address for the individual who oversees the volunteers at the organization.

63. **Tell users when to expect a response on the form and the confirmation page.**

If volunteers can submit their contact information and interests through an online form, it’s important to clearly state when they can expect to be contacted by someone at the organization. This information should be provided on the form as well as on the confirmation page, which should appear after the information has been submitted.
Setting proper expectations will help users understand when they will be contacted and can potentially save organizational staff time by not having to field phone calls and email from potential volunteers who are waiting to hear about the opportunity. The Friends Program clearly stated that a team member would be in contact with the potential volunteers within five business days. This was stated at the top of the volunteer form and on the confirmation page.

Image 1 of 2: The Friends Program included details about when to expect to hear from someone at the organization at the top of the volunteer form.

Image 2 of 2: On the confirmation page that appeared after users submitted the volunteer form, The Friends Program’s website reiterated when potential volunteers could expect to hear from someone at the organization.
The Donation Process

DONATIONS VS. E-COMMERCE TRANSACTIONS

Users have been making purchases on the Web for years, and many saw similarities between purchasing an item and making a donation. They said:

- “Even though it’s a donation, they are going to send you a receipt for your records, and they have all your information as if you were buying something online.”
- “It’s very similar, but easier. You don’t have to put in shipping information.”
- “If you are buying two things from a website, you have a cart, but you are choosing one [donation] amount, so there’s no cart. It’s more streamlined.”
- “It’s pretty similar. They learn from Amazon.com.”

Because of the similarity between the processes of making a donation and purchasing an item, all users were able to make a donation successfully. In fact, the average success rate for the donation task was 100%. This high success rate can be explained with three reasons:

- **Familiarity with completing online transactions:** Users are already familiar with completing e-commerce transactions on the Web. As mentioned previously, they’ve been doing it for years. For this reason, non-profit and charities should pay close attention to best practices on e-commerce sites so they can integrate them into the donation process on their sites.

- **Less required information:** The amount of information required to make a donation is less than the amount of information needed to complete an e-commerce transaction, so the process is simpler and more streamlined—leaving less room for error.

- **Non-profit and charities’ necessity for an easy-to-use donation process:** Non-profit and charity organizations rely on donations to survive. For this reason, they must design and implement a donation process that is easy-to-use. To their benefit, they can refer to many other successful e-commerce and donation processes to help inform their donation process design.

As compared to the checkout process on an e-commerce site, the donation process on a non-profit or charity site has less required information. To complete a donation, organizations must collect three essential items:

- Donation amount
- Donor’s name (or “anonymous”)
- Billing information (credit card details and billing address)

Additional information that can be collected during the donation process, but is not be required to complete a donation, includes:

- A name the donation is being made in honor or memory of
- A specific program or area to apply the donation toward
- A donation frequency (one-time donation or a recurring donation)

Although the donation process requires less information than the checkout process, it took longer for users to complete, on average, than the checkout process. In our studies, the donation process took, on average, four minutes and 15 seconds (from clicking the “donate” call to action until the confirmation page displayed). In our e-commerce study, the checkout process took, on average, three minutes and 58 seconds (from clicking the “checkout” call to action until the confirmation page displayed).

**Average task times: Checkout process vs. donation process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Checkout process</th>
<th>Donation process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>3:58</td>
<td>4:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart above shows the average task time for the checkout process (3 minutes and 58 seconds), as tested in our e-commerce studies, and the donation process (4 minutes and 15 seconds).

The longer task time, on average, was likely caused by a few factors:

- **More familiarity with the checkout process:** Most users in our studies made more online purchases than online donations per year, so they were more familiar with the checkout process and knew what to expect. For this reason, it’s imperative that non-profit and charities strive to mimic the checkout process within the donation process on their sites.

- **More cognitive processing required in the donation process:** Some donation processes had fields or actions, such as making a donation in someone’s honor or setting up recurring donations, which required more cognitive processing than the typical e-commerce checkout.

- **Streamlined checkout processes:** A typical checkout process required users to provide more information, such as a shipping address, as compared to a typical donation process. However, some e-commerce sites provided the option to replicate the billing information in the shipping fields, or vice versa, by selecting a checkbox. This streamlined design allowed users to complete the process more quickly than if they were required to input all requested information manually.
Less information is required to complete a donation as compared to an e-commerce transaction, so the donation form can easily be contained to one page. The sites we tested took various approaches to the donation process, but many limited the form to one page. Some sites broke the process down into multiple steps on several pages. Sites that use this approach should display the steps throughout the process, and allow users to navigate back to previous steps to make a change—which is something that is often done on e-commerce sites.

Most e-commerce sites allow users to create an account that retains their information for future purchases. Non-profits and charity sites may also want to do the same, especially if they have online donors who make regular contributions. In our study, very few sites offered this option for repeat donors.

As observed in both e-commerce and donations studies, users are reluctant to give up personal information, especially phone numbers and email addresses. Non-profit and charity sites should explain why they are asking for this information, and how it will be used.

Confirmation pages are critical on both e-commerce and donation sites. However, non-profit and charity sites must include a confirmation page as part of the donation process, which should include a receipt for tax purposes. Additionally, a receipt should be emailed if an email address is provided during the donation process.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

64. **Answer people’s questions before they initiate the donation process.**

As mentioned previously, users were interested in two things before they felt comfortable making a donation to a non-profit or charity organization. They wanted to know what the organization did and how they used donated funds. Users struggled to locate these facts on the homepages and within the sites of non-profits and charity organizations.

In many cases, critical details, such as how donations were used, were only available once users initiated the donation process. Unfortunately, this information was only found by people who had already decided to make a contribution to the organization. Other users simply researching and evaluating an organization never found these critical details, because they were placed within the donation process.

For example, the Habitat for Humanity website included details about how common donation amounts would be used on the first page of the donation process. One user saw this and said, “It tells you what your donation will buy. That’s interesting. I like the fact that you are actually seeing where your money is going. For $10, I’m buying a box of nails.”

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**Quick Gift Guide**

Your gift could help buy:

- $10 = Box of Nails
- $35 = Roof Shingles
- $50 = Low Flow Toilet
- $75 = Window
- $100 = Kitchen Sink
- $150 = Front Door
- $500 = Siding
- $1000 = Wallboard
- $2000 = Flooring
The Habitat for Humanity site provided examples of tangible items that would be purchased with various donation amounts, but the information was hidden within the donation process.

One user noticed information to convince users to donate to Sustainable Conservation after clicking the Donate link. However, he was surprised by its placement on the first page of the donation process. He said, “If I’m going to this page, I’ve already decided to donate. I think you are already preaching to the choir here.”

The first page of the donation process on the Sustainable Conservation website included reasons to give to the charity. Users who had decided to donate to the organization thought it was too late in the process to present this information.

Although providing this information was helpful, it would have been better to show this prior to the first page of the donation process. Users didn’t see this information until they had already decided to make a donation, but it was critical information that should have been available to everyone researching and evaluating the organization.

Other sites were better at disclosing information about how donations would be used prior to the donation process. The Big Brothers Big Sisters website highlighted how donations would be used on their Support Us page; they specifically listed four ways that donations would improve their programs. The page also stated that 92.2% of their donations were put towards their programs. This information was available prior to moving into the donation process, which allowed users to fully understand
how donations were used within the organization before initiating the donation process.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters site provided information about the percentage of donations that were put towards their programs, along with some brief details about the programs being funded.

65. Make registration optional.

Users want to get through the donation process as quickly and easily as possible. Sites shouldn’t require users to register or log in to make a donation. It’s a deterrent. If site registration or logging in is required, people will be less willing to donate.

One user thought she might have to be a member to donate to the Defenders of Wildlife, because a donation call to action was labeled Donate/Become a Member. This actually wasn’t the case, but the unclear label discouraged her from making a donation. She said, “Defenders of Wildlife might be asking for a membership. I don’t like to subscribe on the Internet, and you get lots of spam mail. I don’t mind donating though.”
A link to donate to the Defenders of Wildlife was labeled Donate/Become a Member, and one user thought she had to be a member to donate.

Users were required to register or log in to donate to Paws with a Cause, which was annoying for one user, who decided to donate to another charity.

Users shouldn’t be required to register in order to donate to an organization, which was done on the Paws with a Cause website.
Registration should not be required, but it can be optional. Some users visiting charity or non-profits sites may know they will donate on a regular basis, so they may benefit from setting up an account; creating an account that includes and stores all necessary information makes regular donations quicker and easier.

Registration can be optional by the simple addition of an optional password field in the donation process. The optional password field should be clearly marked as optional. Also, sites should consider listing the benefits of registration, such as quicker future donations, next to the optional form field.

For example, the Child Advocates donation process included optional registration fields, along with an explanation of why regular donors may want to register. Although registration was optional, the placement of the fields in the right margin was problematic; users typically ignore this area of the page because it’s where advertisements typically appear. Additionally, the visual treatment was similar to that of an advertisement. It would have been better to incorporate the Password field into the form, preferably after the Email field. (Also, using an email address as the user name would have been better; that way users wouldn’t have to create or remember a login ID.)

66. Explain why someone would want to register on the site.

Users don’t want to register on a site unless there are clear benefits for doing so. If site registration is offered, sites should clearly communicate what they offer for those who register.

The Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD) website included a page at the beginning of the donation process that asked users to log in, sign up, or
make a donation without logging in or signing up. Although the three options were presented, the benefits of registering on the site weren’t communicated to donors.

67. Provide login fields for returning donors.

For those who have created a site registration, provide login fields or a link to them. On the first page of the donation process, the American Heart Association provided a Sign In link in the left-hand navigation for returning donors. However, the call to action was hidden within the navigation, which made it difficult for returning donors to quickly locate it on the page. Instead, the page could have included a Sign In link at the top of the form for returning donors, which wouldn’t distract new or unregistered donors from making a donation—and might catch returning donors who don’t want to enter all their information again.
The American Heart Association provided a Sign In link within the navigation. It would have been better to place this link at the top of the page where it would be more noticeable.

68. **Create a donation process that makes sense to users. Consider the transaction and the required information to craft an appropriate donation process.**

When users decided to make a donation, they wanted to do so quickly and easily. Creating a seamless donation process will increase the odds of getting users to complete the process.

In our study, we saw varying approaches to the donation process. Some processes had two steps—a form and a confirmation page—and others were broken down into smaller, incremental steps. Users didn’t gravitate towards one process over another. As long as the information being requested was presented in a clear and easy-to-understand manner, users completed transactions successfully. Problems with completing donations were attributed to undefined steps, poorly labeled fields, required site registration, and unclear error messages, but they weren’t related to the overall method of collecting the information.

Some donation processes were extremely short and to the point. The donation process on the Environmental Defense Fund website was only two steps: a donation form and a confirmation page. The donation form only collected the required information to complete the transaction: the amount of the donation and billing information (name, address, and credit card details). This donation process didn’t
offer a verification page that allowed users to review details before submitting their donation, but a message at the bottom of the page under the *Donate Now* button said “Your credit card will be charged.” After the form was submitted, a confirmation page containing the donation details displayed.

The donation process on the Environmental Defense Fund website had two clear steps: a short donation form and a confirmation page.

The American Heart Association also consolidated their donation process to two steps: a donation form and a confirmation page. Users submitted the donation amount and billing information (name, address, and credit card details). When users completed the form and clicked the *Donate* button, the information was submitted and a confirmation page appeared.
The American Heart Association broke the donation process into two steps: a donation form and a confirmation page.

Some sites broke the donation process down into smaller steps, which was also successful with users. Each step in the process collected specific information so users could focus on the information being requested, and they weren’t distracted by unrelated fields on the page.

The Defenders of Wildlife’s donation process was five steps: select a gift amount, accept or deny a gift (discussed in more detail on page 148), payment and billing information, a verification page, and a confirmation page/receipt.

The Defenders of Wildlife broke their donation process down into five smaller steps, which were displayed at the top of the page throughout the process.

Other sites used the shopping cart method to process donations. In some instances, this made sense, because users were donating a tangible item as opposed to money. For example, users could purchase an animal or a share of an animal for a community or family in need on the Heifer International site. The site needed to support multiple donations in one transaction, so it made sense to use an e-commerce type process that included a shopping cart and a checkout process.
The donation process on the Heifer International website followed a more traditional e-commerce process, but it worked because users were purchasing animals or shares of animals for families in need.

69. **Show the steps in the donation process, and allow users to go back to previous steps.**

For multi-step donation processes, it’s important to indicate the step the user is currently on. This allows users to understand what they have completed and the steps they still need to complete.

It’s not uncommon for users to make mistakes during the donation process. For this reason, it’s important to allow users to go back to previously completed steps to make changes.

The American Red Cross website used a four-step donation process: the first step required users to select a program to apply their donation towards; the second step collected billing and personal information via a form; the third was a verification page; and the fourth was a confirmation page. The first step of the process, the program selection, was technically a step, but it wasn’t shown as a step in the overall donation process. If users wanted to change the program they’d selected when they were further along in the process, they had to abort the donation process and start over.
The first step in the American Red Cross donation process was to select a program to receive the donation.
The *Gift & Payment Information* page was listed as *Step 1* in the donation process on the American Red Cross website, but it was actually the second step; the first step was the program selection. Users couldn't go back and change the area they wanted to donate to unless they started the donation process again.
The American Cancer Society had a four-step donation process. The first step asked users to select a donation amount, gift type (general, memorial, or honor) and program to apply the donation towards. The second step asked for a name and billing information (contact information, credit card details, and a billing address), and the third and fourth steps asked users to review and submit the provided information.

Throughout the donation process, users could see their location in a progress bar at the top of the page. Before they submitted the donation, they could navigate back to a previously completed step to make changes or edits to the provided information by clicking on the step in the progress bar.

The American Cancer Society included a four-step donation process. Users could see their progression through the process and navigate to previously completed steps to make changes.

70. **Streamline the donation process.**

Some of the sites we tested had unnecessary steps within the donation process, which only confused users.

When users tried to make a donation on the Defenders of Wildlife website, they selected a donation amount, and were then asked if they wanted a free jacket with their donation of $20 or more. This step was unexpected and confusing for users. Instead, this site should have grouped this with another step, such as the Gift Amount step, or removed it altogether from the donation process.
This random *Premium* step in the donation process on the Defenders of Wildlife site was unnecessary and unexpected as a separate step.

The first step in the donation process on the National Gallery of Art website showed a brief statement and two images that had to be clicked in order to launch the second step in the process, the donation form. This was an unnecessary step and should have been omitted.

Users had to click on one of these two images to get to the second step in the donation process, which was an unintuitive and unnecessary step.

**71. Avoid routing users to a third-party application as the only option to complete the donation process.**

On several sites, users were routed to a third-party application when they initiated the donation process. Of the 39 donation processes we tested, 69% brought users to a third-party payment application, such as PayPal, Google Checkout, GiveDirect, or
another payment application, to complete the donation process. Users were annoyed and confused when this happened. They said:

- “I’ve never seen a charity site link to Google Checkout.”
- “I think I have a Google Checkout login, but I’m not sure.”
- “The credit card is easier, because I can’t always remember my PayPal login.”
- “This must be like ‘PayPal’ for charities.”

Not only was the experience jarring and unexpected, but it also caused a lot of frustration. Applications like PayPal and Google Checkout suggested that users log in to complete a transaction, but users in our study either didn’t have a login or couldn’t remember it. Although these applications allowed users to complete the transaction without registering or logging in, they were designed in a way that made this unintuitive or confusing.

Unfortunately, if users are routed to a third-party application to complete the donation process, organizations have no control over the usability or performance of the system and may lose donations due to these factors.

The Seacoast Family Food Pantry required users to check out using PayPal, which was problematic for one user. The “Update Total” interaction wasn’t entirely clear, which caused him to type in his information twice. It took him twice as long to make a donation as it should have, and he grew frustrated with the process.

If users wanted to make a donation to the Seacoast Family Food Pantry, they were required to complete the transaction using PayPal. One user was slowed down when he didn’t understand he needed to click *Update Total* in order to submit his donation amount. This was a poor design.
To make a donation to the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis, users had to complete the donation using Google Checkout.

72. **If routing users to a third-party payment application, warn them.**

If organizations use a third-party payment application, this should be clearly stated within the donation process. This allows users to be fully informed about who is handling their sensitive information.

The American Heart Association clearly stated that Kimbia, Inc. was used for the “secure processing” of donations. This statement was provided at the bottom of the donation form and reiterated on the confirmation page.
The American Heart Association’s donation form clearly stated that a third party was being used to process donations given to the organization.

73. **If using a third-party payment application, create a seamless experience. Use a visual design that’s the same as the organization’s main site, and don’t launch the payment application in a new window.**

Some third-party payment applications, such as those provided by Blackbaud, allowed organizations to design and integrate the application into their own site so the experience was seamless; the payment application opened in the same window and the visual design followed the organization’s main website.

For example, when users clicked the *Make a Gift* link on the Lymphoma Research Foundation website, the first page of the donation process loaded in the same window and was visually consistent with the rest of the site.

Image 1 of 2: The Lymphoma Research Foundation’s homepage had a white background and used blue, black, and red as main site colors.

Image 2 of 2: The first page of the donation process on the Lymphoma Research Foundation’s site had a visual design and navigation system that was consistent with the rest of the site, which created a seamless donation experience for users.
In contrast, when users chose to donate to Pro Portsmouth Inc., a new window launched with the JustGive.org third-party payment application, which had a visual design that was jarringly different than the main site.

Image 1 of 2: The Pro Portsmouth Inc. homepage included a white background and the use of yellow, blue, and red as the main colors.

Image 2 of 2: The donation process for Pro Portsmouth Inc. launched in a new window, and the visual design and navigation system were drastically different than the organization’s main site.
74. **Don’t allow third-party payment applications to solicit additional funds from donors.**

The third-party payment application used by some sites asked users to give an additional donation that would be directed to them.

One user in our study noticed that JustGive.org selected a checkbox by default that would direct an additional $3.00 donation to them when he made a $10.00 donation to Pro Portsmouth Inc. He was annoyed that the application tried to trick him into making an additional donation to them, because he knew the company likely already received a percentage of the total donation. He said, “I don’t want to donate to JustGive. They are just the vehicle. Besides, I’m sure they already take a portion of this $10.00.”

[Image of JustGive.org's donation page]

The third-party payment application used by Pro Portsmouth Inc., JustGive.org, automatically opted users into a $3.00 donation that would be directed to them.

Don’t allow third-party payment applications to solicit additional donations from donors. If it must be provided as an option, ensure that users have to select the option by default, not de-select it.

75. **Consider providing familiar third-party payment options in addition to payment through the website.**

Although sites shouldn’t rely on third-party payment options as the only way for users to make a donation, they should consider providing options for those that want to use familiar payment applications. People in our studies made comments about the lack of a PayPal option during the donation process on some sites. One user said, while completing the donation process on the New Israel Fund website, “It’d be nice if there were a PayPal option.”

Another user talked about what prevented her from making a donation to some organizations in the past. She said, “The only thing that has prevented me [from donating] is when I didn’t have my wallet in front of me and the site didn’t have a PayPal link.”
76. **Provide information and a link to more details about secure payment processing.**

Users were cautious when providing sensitive information online. Some looked for information about secure payment processing. Information about security should be provided on every page of the donation process, along with a link to additional details.

Paws With A Cause included an Authorize.Net security logo, which linked to additional details about how the third-party protected provided sensitive information.

![Authorize.Net Verified Merchant Seal](image)

An Authorize.Net logo informed users that the third-party protected their sensitive information. The logo linked to additional information about their transaction processing security.

77. **Clearly present options to make an offline donation, such as over the phone or through the mail.**

Some users may want to donate to an organization, but they may not feel comfortable providing sensitive information online, especially if they are brought to a third-party site that doesn’t seem to be part of the main organization’s website.
For this reason, it’s important to provide information about other ways to donate to the organization, such as through the mail or over the phone. For example, the Children’s Scholarship Fund described three ways to donate: online, through the mail, or through wire transfers/stock. This allowed users to choose the donation method they were most comfortable with. It also would have been helpful to provide a toll-free number for those who wanted to donate over the phone.

The Children’s Scholarship Fund provided three ways to donate to the organization: online, through the mail, or through a wire transfer/stock.

Goodwill provided details about mobile text (SMS) donations on the first page of their donation process. In addition to the texting instructions, details about the donation amount, applicable rates, additional tips, and a link to the full terms were provided.

Goodwill provided instructions on texting donations to the organization.

The ability to receive mobile donations is especially important for causes that can have a time-sensitive or location-dependent element—these being the two main reasons for people to use a mobile device instead of a desktop computer. Examples include disaster relief (when they hear breaking news, people may be motivated to donate here and now) and museums and performing arts (for example, while
somebody is viewing a painting that’s currently on loan, ask them to contribute to the permanent acquisition of that painting). 10

DATA COLLECTION

78. Focus on collecting the required information to complete a donation: the donation amount, the donor’s name (as well as an “anonymous” option, and the billing information (credit card details and billing address). Make optional fields clearly optional.

Sites should pay close attention to making it quick and easy for users to provide the information required to make a donation: the donation amount, the donor’s name, and billing information.

Additional optional form fields, such as making a donation in honor of someone, should only be displayed if users have indicated that they want to provide it.

For example, the American Heart Association presented users with a form that focused on the required information. This allowed users to focus on what they needed to provide in order to complete the donation, and they weren’t distracted by optional form fields.

The donation form on the American Heart Association website was streamlined and only asked for the information required to process a donation.

Other sites had more complex donation processes and included optional form fields even when users hadn’t indicated that they were interested in completing them.

For example, the donation form on the St. Anselm College’s website included options to create a joint gift with a spouse, make a donation in honor of someone, and make

10 For detailed usability guidelines for the design of mobile user interfaces, please see our separate report on this topic. http://www.nngroup.com/reports/mobile/
a donation on behalf of a person or organization. These options didn’t apply to the user in our study, and he had to scroll past them to get to the required fields. Additionally, the optional fields weren’t clearly labeled as optional, so the user had to review each field individually to decide whether or not he was required to provide the information.

The donation form on the St. Anselm College’s website included numerous optional form fields that cluttered the page and added unnecessary complexity.

If optional form fields are provided by default, clearly indicate that users do not need to provide the information to make a donation. Users must be able to quickly identify what’s required. Otherwise, they may be overwhelmed by the amount of information they think they need to provide. This can be done by placing an asterisk at the beginning of the form field label, like the Alzheimer’s Association did, so users can quickly identify required fields as they scan down the left side of the page.
The Alzheimer's Association indicated required fields on their donation form with a red asterisk at the beginning of the form field label.

79. **Use progressive disclosure to simplify forms.**

Some sites used a progressive disclosure approach on the donation form to simplify the process. Users were only shown additional fields if they selected the applicable option, such as making a gift in honor of someone. This streamlined the donation form and didn't cause users to become overwhelmed with the amount of open form fields (both required and optional) that displayed on the donation form.

For example, the “I Have A Dream” Foundation’s donation form collected two types of information: donor information and billing information. However, if a user selected any of the checkboxes on the form, such as *Yes, my employer will match donations.*, additional fields appeared.
The Company and Special Instructions fields only appeared if the checkbox above the fields (Yes, my employer will match donations.) was selected.
The American Cancer Society asked users a series of questions during the first step of the donation process. If certain selections were made, such as making a gift in someone’s honor, the applicable fields would display.

Image 1 of 2: The first page of the American Cancer Society donation process included a series of three questions. Additional fields displayed when necessary. For example, users could choose to make a general gift, a memorial gift, or an honor gift. If they chose to make a memorial or honor gift, additional fields displayed.

Image 2 of 2: If users chose to make an honor gift, the form displayed additional applicable fields: *First Name*, *Last Name*, and the option to send an announcement card.
80. **Consider using a gateway page to route users to the appropriate form.**

Another option that can be used to simplify the donation process is to present a gateway page to send users to the appropriate form. This allows the site to identify the donation type so the appropriate information can be collected during the donation process.

For example, the first step in the Southern New Hampshire University donation process asked users to choose to make a one-time gift or a monthly gift. Based on what users selected, the appropriate form fields displayed.

Although the two options were provided, the page was text-heavy and the calls to action weren’t prioritized. It would have been better to present two links or buttons (*Make my Single Year Gift* or *Enroll in Monthly Giving*) at the top of the page, followed by an explanation of each option.

The first step in the donation process on the Southern New Hampshire University site asked users to choose to make a one-time or recurring donation. However, the page contained too much text, which pushed the calls to action further down the page.

Although a gateway page can simplify the process, there are some things to be cautious of. First, when users click a “donate” call to action, they expect to see a form that asks for the donation amount and payment information. If they are presented with a page asking them to identify their donation type, they may be confused or think they did something wrong. Additionally, users may be put-off by having to make such a detailed decision so early in the donation process.

Also, gateway pages can be designed incorrectly. For example, the gateway page on the Sustainable Conservation website asked users to make a one-time gift, a recurring gift, or an honorary gift. Unfortunately, these options weren’t mutually
exclusive. If a user wants to make a one-time gift in honor of someone, what link should they choose?

The first step in the donation process on the Sustainable Conservation site asked users to select a one-time, monthly, or honorary gift. Although it may have streamlined the next steps in the process, the options weren’t mutually exclusive.

81. **Allow users to make an anonymous donation.**

Some sites provided users with the option to make an anonymous donation, which some users appreciated, because they didn’t want to get bombarded with mail, phone calls, and email.

One user noticed the option on the Sustainable Conservation site. Although he didn’t select it, he said, “It’s nice, because I can donate anonymously so my name doesn’t get traded to other lists or charities.” Another said, “I like that you can do it anonymously. Unfortunately, after you make a donation, they do nothing but hound you repeatedly for repeated ones.”

Users were able to make an anonymous donation on the Sustainable Conservation site, which was appreciated by some users.

82. **List pre-defined contribution amounts, along with an “other” option for users who want to donate a different amount.**

Some sites suggested various donation amounts, which some users found helpful. Some users selected a pre-defined amount and others chose to input their own donation amount.
The Boys & Girls Clubs of America listed predefined amounts, along with an “other” option for users who wanted to contribute a different amount.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gift Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Select Gift Amount:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Users could select a suggested amount or type in a different amount on the Boys & Girls Clubs of America site.

83. **Consider associating donation amounts with tangible items.**

Users wanted to know how their donations would make an impact. To help users visualize how their donation will be used, sites should associate donation amounts with tangible items that will be provided to individuals, families, or communities. For example, the Action Against Hunger site listed pre-defined contribution amounts as well as what each amount would purchase, which helped users understand the impact of their donation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make a One-Time Donation to Action Against Hunger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Gift Amount</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Action Against Hunger site suggested donation amounts and associated tangible items with each amount.

The Heifer International charity allowed individuals to purchase animals for communities in need instead of giving a general donation. For each animal type, they explained how the recipients would benefit from the gift. One user said, “I’d probably choose to donate to this, because it’s so unique... so personable.”
The description of how families would use a pig convinced one user to donate to Heifer International.

84. Provide the option for users to set up a recurring donation, but always provide the option for a one-time donation.

All users made one-time donations during our study, but some appreciated the option to set up a recurring donation. The National Education for Assistive Dog Services (NEADS) website allowed users to make a one-time donation or set up a recurring donation.

The NEADS website allowed users to make a one-time donation or set up a recurring (monthly or quarterly) donation.

One user, while attempting to donate to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, couldn’t find a place to make a one-time donation. All pre-defined donation amounts included the phrase “Annual Fund Donor,” which made her think it would be a recurring donation. She became frustrated, and said, “It says annual fund. I’m not sure what annual
fund is. Is it some sort of term that galleries use? It looks like annual contributions. At this point, I would hightail it out of here.”

One user couldn’t find a way to make a one-time donation to the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The word “annual” made her think it was a recurring donation.

The same user went to the National Gallery of Art’s website and had trouble finding a way to make a one-time donation on their site as well. She thought she could only make an annual donation and was skeptical to choose General Support, because it wasn’t clear if she was committing to donate to them each year. She said, “If this is a way to make a one-time donation, they need to clearly state it. It’s really hidden. It leads you to think that whatever the ‘circle’ is, you’d be a regular contributing member.”

It wasn’t clear to users if the General Support donation on the National Gallery of Art’s website was a one-time donation or an annual commitment.

85. **Allow users to apply their donation to a specific area or program, but always provide a “general support” or “greatest need” option.**

Some users wanted control over where their donated money would be applied. Several sites we tested allowed users to designate a program or area that their donation would be used for.
For example, users who donated to the University of New Hampshire could choose to
direct their donation to various programs or schools. They also had the option to
direct their donation to the *Greatest Need/Unrestricted*.

**Please select the fund(s) you would like to support.**

Donors could choose how they wanted to direct their donation on the University
of New Hampshire website.

The Children’s Scholarship Fund allowed users to select a geographical area to
support. One user appreciated the option, but decided to apply her donation as
*General Support*. 
Users could select a Program Area to support on the Children’s Scholarship Fund site or they could choose the General Support option.

Goodwill allowed users to direct their donations to a local chapter. On the first page of the donation process, they asked users to direct their donation to one of three areas: programs in their local community, programs in the United States and Canada, or programs outside of the United States and Canada.

If a user chose to donate locally, for example, they were able to search for affiliates by state, which returned relevant affiliates to direct a donation towards.

These options were nice to have, but the site should have also provided a “greatest need” option for those who didn’t have a preference.
At the beginning of the donation process, Goodwill asked users to select one of three areas to direct their donation towards. It also would have been nice to provide a “greatest need” option.

Users could search for and choose the local Goodwill chapter they wanted to direct their donation towards during the donation process.

In addition to selecting a location or program on the donation form, some sites provided tools that routed users to affiliate or chapter sites. This isn’t as desirable, because it removes users from the donation process on the main site and routes them to the local site which may not have an easy-to-use donation process. However, users still appreciated the option to donate locally.

One user had an option to specify her donation on the Boys & Girls Club website, and said, “I like the idea of donating to a specific club, so let me look for a local club.” The Find a Club link on the donation page brought her to the site’s search feature that allowed her to locate a club by ZIP Code. The site returned a list of local chapters, and she navigated to the Manchester, New Hampshire club’s website and made a donation through their site.
Users appreciated the Boys & Girls Club *Find a Club* feature; it allowed users to search for and navigate to local affiliate sites to donate to.

86. **If users can designate their donation to a specific program, define the programs in context.**

Although users appreciated the ability to choose where their money went, it was useless if they didn’t understand what the programs were about.

While making a donation on the Wildlife Alliance website, one user noticed she could designate her donation to a specific program and said, “So you can choose a program, which is pretty nice. I will choose ‘The Rescue Center’… or the ‘Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team.’ I’m not entirely sure what these programs are.”

One user wanted to choose a specific program for her donation to the Wildlife Alliance, but she wasn’t sure what the various programs were about.

The American Red Cross allowed users to select the program they wanted to donate to, and provided ample information about each program. While making a donation to the American Red Cross, one user said, “I like the idea that I have a choice to designate my donation, and I can see what each program is about.”
The American Red Cross clearly defined the programs users could direct their donations towards.

87. **Consider allowing users to identify an individual to make a contribution in honor or memory of.**

Some charities, especially those that support medical research, treatment, and awareness should allow users to specify an individual to make their donation in honor or memory of. Other charities should consider doing the same, because users in our study appreciated the option (although no one actually did it). Another reason to have this feature: It’s becoming more common for family members of a deceased person to request that people
send donations to a charity instead of sending flowers. Several people in our study said they made donations in honor of loved ones after they had passed.

Some of the sites we tested allowed users to do this. On The Conservation Fund site, users could identify an individual to make a tribute to, and they could also send a tribute card to the individual or a family member.

![Optional Tribute Information](image)

Users could make a tribute to someone when they made a donation on The Conservation Fund’s website.

Other sites were simpler when capturing this information, such as the American Red Cross. The donation form asked for the individual’s first name only, and the donor wasn’t able to send a tribute card.

![Tribute Gift Information](image)

Users could make a donation as a tribute to an individual on the American Red Cross site.

88. **Don’t ask for unnecessary information.**

Avoid collecting information that isn’t relevant or necessary to complete the transaction. Asking for information that isn’t required to complete a donation causes user confusion, creates a longer donation process, and increases the number of opportunities for users to make mistakes that prevent them from successfully completing the task.

One user, while making a donation on The Conservation Fund website, was stumped by the field *Name Recognition*. She also was annoyed by the *How Did You Hear*
About Us? field. Although these fields weren’t required, they got in this user’s way as she filled out the form.

Some fields on The Conservation Fund’s donation form annoyed one user, because the information wasn’t necessary to complete the transaction.

Several users were confused by the Comments field on many of the donation forms we tested. One user came across the Comments field on the New Hampshire Food Bank site, and said, “Comments? I don’t have anything so I’ll leave that blank.”

The Comments field on the New Hampshire Food Bank’s donation form confused one user.

The Mission American donation form had a field for Designation/Notes and instructional copy that asked users to specify the name of the national facilitator that the donation was for. If this was a popular piece of data collected, there should have been a specific field on the form dedicated to it.

The Designation/Notes field on the Mission America donation form was unnecessary.

89. If an email address or phone number is required, explain why it’s needed and how it will be used.

Users in our study were hesitant to give out their phone numbers and email addresses, but one or both were required to complete a transaction on most of the websites we tested. Although the organizations requested this information, most websites failed to explain why they needed it or how it would be used.
Users made comments throughout the studies when they were asked for their phone numbers and email addresses. They said:

- “I hope they don’t call me.”
- “I hate giving my email, because I don’t want to get spammed.”
- “It’s asking for my phone number, and I don’t like to give that out.”
- “Phone number isn't required... good. I don’t want people calling me at home.”

In our study, many sites failed to explain why they asked for an email address or phone number. However, some sites we tested, such as Heifer International and Habitat for Humanity, provided some explanation about why they needed an email address.

Heifer International provided a short explanation under the email field label that explained that a receipt would be emailed to the address for tax purposes.

90. **Let users opt-in (not opt-out) to further email communications.**

Users were aware that organizations may use their email address to send further communications. As he was filling out the email address field while completing a donation, one user said “I’ll use the one I don’t really check,” because he didn’t want to be bombarded with unwanted email.

If offering newsletter or email subscriptions as part of the donation process, always give users the choice to opt-in to the email by default. Don’t automatically register users for email as part of the donation process. Users may not notice the pre-selected checkbox as they complete the donation process, and they may feel annoyed and deceived when they start receiving unsolicited email. Even worse, they may decide to stop supporting the organization if they feel as though they’ve been “tricked” into receiving email or become annoyed with the messages.
Sustainable Conservation offered a subscription to their email publications as part of the donation process, giving the users the option to choose to receive them by selecting the checkbox.

NARAL Pro-Choice America opted users in for email updates by default as part of the donation process. It would have been better to leave the checkbox deselected by default so users could make a conscious decision to receive email communications from the organization.

NARAL Pro-Choice America opted-in users to email communications by default during the donation process on their site.

**SUBMITTING AND VERIFYING INFORMATION**

91. When an error occurs, indicate which fields had the problem and how to fix the error.

   When error messages are poorly indicated, users overlook them and question why the form isn’t being accepted by the site. When a user has left a required field blank or filled in a field incorrectly, indicate which field has the problem and explain how to fix the error.

   One user, while making a donation to The Conservation Fund, forgot to put her credit card number in the form before she hit the Submit button. The form wasn’t accepted, but it displayed a clear error message at the top of the page and the problematic field was indicated on the form.
The error message at the top of the donation form on The Conservation Fund’s website clearly indicated what the problem was. The field that needed to be corrected was highlighted in red, which was helpful, because the form was extremely long and the Card Number field was below the fold. (Note that a small percentage of the population has color-deficient vision and may not perceive red as a distinct color. Thus, it’s recommended to employ redundant design cues that work even for users who can’t distinguish the colors: here, upper-case text and a bolder border.)

Another user, while trying to make a donation to the National Gallery of Art, didn’t provide his evening telephone number in the form and received an error message when he tried to submit his donation. The error message displayed at the top of the form in tiny red text and was easy to miss because there was a substantial amount
He didn’t realize what was wrong and blamed himself. He said, “Oh no, what did I do? Maybe I can’t donate online. Maybe I have to print this out and send it in.”

He read through the text at the top of the screen very intently but continued to miss the error message because it wasn’t big enough, and the problematic field wasn’t indicated on the form itself.

The error message on the National Gallery of Art’s donation form was easy to miss, because the text was too small and placed above a large block of text, and the problematic field wasn’t indicated on the form itself.
92. **Provide a page where people can review and verify information before finalizing the donation.**

Users make errors while filling out forms and are especially wary when submitting sensitive information, such as billing information. When all necessary information has been collected, present it back to the user so it can be verified.

One user, when making a donation to the New Hampshire Food Bank, completed a donation form and when she clicked *Submit*, her donation was immediately processed. She expected to have a chance to review the details before she committed to the transaction and said, “I see a confirmation page. There’s no way to check my information before submitting?”

93. **Allow users to go back and make changes before submitting their donation.**

In addition to presenting information back to the user to verify, allow users to go back to make edits to incorrect information. If this isn’t allowed, users will need to abort the process and begin again—which may never happen.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America provided a verification page that users could review before submitting the transaction. The page allowed users to go back and make changes by clicking the *Previous* button.

![Verification Page Example](image)

The verification page on the Boys & Girls Clubs of America site allowed users to go back and make changes, if necessary.
CONFIRMATION PAGE

94. **Confirm that the transaction has been processed.**

   Once a user’s information has been submitted, present a confirmation page that details the donation. Confirmation pages communicate to users that their actions were successful. If a confirmation page isn’t presented, users will doubt that they submitted the donation correctly.

   One user, after submitting a donation on the National Education for Assistive Dog Services site, received a confirmation page that highlighted the details of his contribution. He said, “It’s always nice to have an acknowledgement, because if not, you don’t know if it went through or not.”

95. **Thank users for their donation, and tell them how it will be used.**

   On the confirmation page, thank users for their donation. It doesn’t need to be elaborate, but a simple recognition is appreciated. Also, it’s nice to reiterate how the money will be used.

   The Wildlife Alliance’s confirmation page thanked the user and explained how the money would help improve specific programs.

   ```
   Thank you for your donation in support of Wildlife Alliance’s mission to provide direct protection to endangered wildlife and endangered habitat.

   Your gift will make a difference — it enables us to consistently provide direct protection to wildlife by strengthening parks, stopping the illegal wildlife trade and reducing demand for products made from endangered species.

   Wildlife Alliance is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization in the United States of America with Federal Tax ID #52-1934148. No goods or services of any value were received in exchange for this gift. Your gift may be tax-deductible in accordance with U.S. tax law. Please see below for a receipt of your transaction.

   Once again, on behalf of all the animals we strive to protect, thank you for your support.

   Sincerely,
   Wildlife Alliance
   ```

   The Wildlife Alliance’s confirmation page thanked the user and provided details about how the money would be used.

   The Action Against Hunger’s confirmation page thanked donors for the contribution and provided the specific percentage (90%) of the donation that would be used for their programs.
The Action Against Hunger confirmation page thanked the donor and stated that 90% of the donation would be used towards funding their programs.

96. **Provide a printable receipt that can be used for tax purposes.**

People write off donations. Allow users to print the donation information for tax purposes by presenting a receipt that includes necessary information, such as the amount, date, the name of the charity, and the charity's tax ID.

97. **If an email address is collected during the donation process, state that a receipt will be sent to the provided email address.**

In addition to presenting a printable receipt on the confirmation page, also tell users that a receipt will be sent to the email address provided during the donation process. Some users may not have access to a printer at the time of donation, so sending another copy to their email for their records is helpful. Emailed receipts are especially important for donations made on mobile devices.

One user, while skimming a confirmation page, noticed that it asked him to print the receipt for his records, and it didn’t state if it would be emailed to him. He was annoyed that a copy of the receipt wouldn’t be emailed to him, and said, “It’d be nice if they emailed this to me as well since I gave them my email address. It doesn’t look like they will.”

98. **Consider asking users to email the site or information about the charity to their friends.**

It’s a good idea to use donors as messengers, but organizations should be tactful and ask at the right time.

One user, after making a donation on the Habitat For Humanity website, received a confirmation page that requested he send information about the charity to his friends. This user thought it was a good idea, and he said, “When it comes to fundraising, I’m open to anything. There are never enough ways to get the word out.”

The confirmation page on the Habitat for Humanity site prompted donors to send a link to the site to their friends, which one user appreciated. However, the non-descriptive link name, *clicking here*, was easy to overlook, because it didn’t accurately describe where it would bring the user.
99. **Consider including a tracking code or an identification number unique to the transaction.**

Some users may need to contact an organization regarding a donation. To make things easy, consider providing a tracking code or unique number for each donation made on the site. This will be handy for both the organization and the donor if they are contacted about the transaction in the future.

The Boys & Girls Club of America provided a 4-digit transaction ID on their confirmation page, which could be used if the donor needed to contact the organization about the donation.

![The confirmation page on the Boys & Girls Club of America’s site provided a transaction ID.](Image)

The Interfaith Alliance also offered a transaction ID for each donation made on the site.

![The Interfaith Alliance assigned a unique 6-digit transaction ID to each donation made on the site.](Image)

100. **If the name of the charge that shows up on a credit card statement will be different than the charity name, notify users.**

To avoid calls, questions, and credit card disputes, let users know if the charge name on their credit card statement will be different than the charity name. Users are wary of unrecognizable charges made to their credit cards, so alerting them ahead of time may help in avoiding unnecessary phone calls and email at a later date.

The Children’s Scholarship Fund used GiveDirect to process their donations, and let users know on the verification and confirmation pages that the name GIVEDIRECT would be associated with the donation on their credit card statement. However, the information was overlooked by users in the study, because it was easily mistaken for fine print, which is something that users typically ignore.
The Children’s Scholarship Fund explained that GIVEDIRECT would be associated with the charge on the donor’s credit card statement.

Similarly, GROUNDSPRING.org processed the donations made through the Sustainable Conservation website, and this was stated in a bolded red font in all caps on the confirmation page, which was overkill, particularly since red is commonly used for error messages. It would have been better to use bolded text in sentence case; it would have caught users’ attention without being over-emphasized. The formatting also made the message more difficult to read.

Sustainable Conservation informed users that GROUNDSPRING.org would appear on their credit card statement.

101. Prioritize details on the confirmation page.

Many details need to be provided on the confirmation page, but they should be prioritized. If information isn’t prioritized on the confirmation page, it can be easily missed by donors.

Information on the confirmation page should be given priority and presented in the following order:

- “Thank you”
- Receipt will be sent to email address, if provided
- Printable receipt
- Tax deduction details
- How the money will be used

The following optional details can be provided afterwards, if necessary:

- The name of the charge to expect on a credit card statement, if different than the organization name
- Tracking code or ID number
- Requests to email friends or share on social networks

The Heifer International confirmation page displayed optional details before higher-priority details. For example, they provided a link for donors to tell their family and friends about the organization via email towards the top of the page. This call to action pushed other essential information, such as the printable receipt, below the page fold.

When one user saw the confirmation page, she wasn’t sure if her donation had been processed. She said “So, I’m not really sure where it says that it’s complete, but I guess that’s it.”
Thank you! Your generosity just sparked a cycle of giving...

...a cycle that will transform lives for generations to come.

Heifer recipients receive months of training in how to care for their animal; sell the milk, eggs or other products at market; and restore the environment. Passing on this knowledge as well as the offspring of the gift animal is at the heart of Heifer's model which has been ending hunger and poverty for over 60 years.

You can bring that change home to your own community in the following ways:

1. **Tell your friends and family you support Heifer.**
   Send your friends and family an email through our easy-to-use email tool and let them know you choose to support Heifer this year.

2. **Team up with your employer.**
   Thousands of employers will match your charitable gift to Heifer International. You can check if yours does by submitting your employer's name to our online matching gifts search tool.

3. **Send a card with your Heifer gift.**
   Our online cards are a great way to notify your friend or family member of the special Heifer gift you made in their honor. Send an e-card or print out a card online now.

Important information wasn’t prioritized on the Heifer International confirmation page.
Selling Products

Users expected the shopping experience on non-profit and charity websites to mimic their experiences on other e-commerce websites. For that reason, it’s important to integrate recognizable and usable e-commerce interactions and patterns into product browsing, the shopping cart, and the checkout process.

The purpose of this section is to identify and discuss guidelines that are specific to the e-commerce process on non-profit and charity sites. For additional information and general e-commerce guidelines, please see our extensive report series.

http://www.nngroup.com/reports/ecommerce/

102. Sell items users expect to purchase from a non-profit or charity: branded items and products related to the organization’s mission.

Users who purchased items from non-profit and charity websites were drawn to items that included the organization’s name, such as a t-shirt, or were related to their work. Some users became overwhelmed with the number and variation of items available for purchase on some sites.

For example, the American Diabetes Association sold a variety of different branded products: from t-shirts to cookbooks. These were items that users expected to see on the site. However, they also sold other items that weren’t clearly branded or related to their overall mission. For example, users could purchase a travel alarm clock from the site.

Users could purchase a travel alarm clock from the American Diabetes Association, but it didn’t contain branding and wasn’t clearly related to their mission and goals.

Other sites only provided items that were clearly related to the organization’s work. The MSPCA Angell website provided two mini-stores on their site: a dog store and a cat store. One user in our study was interested in buying a toy for her cat, and she
was able to quickly navigate to the appropriate area of the site and locate an item to purchase.

One user purchased a cat toy from the MSPCA Angell organization. She was able to quickly locate the item, because the store was organized by pet type: dog and cat.

103. Create a cohesive site experience by placing the e-commerce area within the main site.

To create a cohesive user experience for users who are interested in purchasing a product, place the shopping area of the site within the main site. This will allow users to seamlessly navigate to the e-commerce area of the site without being interrupted by a new window or a change in visual design or navigation.
The American Diabetes Association contained the e-commerce area of the site within the *Shop* category. Users navigated to this area of the site to browse products and make a purchase, which had a navigation system and a visual design that was consistent with the rest of the site.

Image 1 of 2: Users could access the e-commerce area of the American Diabetes Association’s site from the homepage (shown above) or from any other page in the site.

Image 2 of 2: When users navigated to the e-commerce area of the American Diabetes Association, the visual design and site navigation was consistent with the rest of the site.
104. **If users are sent to a new site or URL, create a visual consistency between the main site and the shopping site.**

If users must be sent to a specific e-commerce site to make a purchase, ensure there is visual design consistency between the main site and the e-commerce site. If the look and feel of the shopping site is drastically different than the main site, users may question whether or not they are in the right place, and they may hesitate to browse products or make a purchase.

For example, the main colors on the MSPCA Angell homepage and site were bright blue, white, and yellow. If users clicked on the *Online Store* category in the main navigation, they were brought to a new site that used dark blue, white, and red as the main colors. The visual design was inconsistent and jarring.

![Image 1 of 2: The MSPCA Angell homepage and site used bright blue, white, and yellow as the main colors.](image1.png)

![Image 2 of 2: Most colors used on the MSPCA Angell online store were inconsistent with the main site: dark blue, white, gray, and red.](image2.png)
The Appalachian Trail Conservancy had a shopping site that was more visually consistent with the main site. The main colors used on both sites were light green, blue, orange, and white, which created a more cohesive experience for shoppers.

Image 1 of 2: The Appalachian Trail Conservancy homepage and site used a specific set of colors: bright green, blue, orange, and white.

Image 2 of 2: The colors used on the Appalachian Trail Conservancy shopping site were consistent with the organization’s official site.
105. **Allow users to purchase an item without registering on the site.**

Users don’t want to register on a site to make a purchase (or a donation, as discussed in Guideline 65 on page 137). Users don’t want to take the time to register, provide personal information, and create (yet another) username and password. For this reason, it’s important to allow users to make a purchase without registering on the site.

Some sites, such as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, required users to register in order to make a purchase. When a user who wanted to make a purchase saw the registration request, he became annoyed and said, “I don’t like this business about having to register. I just want to buy without registering on the site. For this site, I don’t think it’s possible. I don’t want to open an account and all that jazz. I just want to buy something.”

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy required users to register or sign in to the site in order to make a purchase. This was off-putting to one user.

If users wanted to make a purchase on the American Heart Association’s website, they were give three options: log in, create a new account, or checkout as a guest. This allowed users to purchase without registering or logging in to the site. A user in our study didn’t have an existing account and didn’t want to create one, so she purchased a product as a guest.

Users who purchased from the American Heart Association weren’t required to log in or register on the site; they could make a purchase as a guest.
106. Don’t ask users to donate or become a member during the checkout process. If it can’t be avoided, be graceful when doing so.

Users who purchase from charity or non-profit sites expect the experience to be quick, easy, and similar to experiences on other e-commerce sites. They don’t want to be distracted or annoyed with additional offers or solicitations. Sites should avoid any additional requests for money during the checkout process, because users may become irritated and leave the process altogether—resulting in a lost sale.

If donation or membership requests must be integrated into the checkout process, be sure the request isn’t bombarding or overly distracting.

For example, during the checkout process on the American Red Cross’ e-commerce site, a pop-up displayed on the page where users were asked to review their order details. The pop-up asked users to donate to disaster relief by “rounding up” the order total or by specifying a donation amount. The pop-up was intrusive and appeared during a very critical step in the checkout process: the Review page. Additionally, the “rounding up” option was unclear. One user wasn’t sure if his $7.95 order would be “rounded up” to the nearest dollar or up to $10.00.

The American Red Cross’ checkout process included a pop-up on the Review page that asked users to donate to disaster relief by “rounding up” the order total or by specifying a donation amount.

The American Heart Association used a more subtle approach to asking for donations during the checkout process. The request displayed within the Shopping Cart before users began the checkout process. It was placed below the item listed in the Shopping Cart and gave users pre-defined donation amounts, along with an open field for specifying a different amount. This was less intrusive than the American Red Cross’ approach, because it didn’t abruptly interrupt the purchasing process and could be easily ignored.
The American Heart Association asked for donations on the Shopping Cart page, but placed the information below the most critical details—what was in the cart—and provided pre-defined donation amounts along with an open field for specifying another amount.

The New Hampshire Historical Society integrated membership options into the checkout process on their site. When users added an item to the shopping cart and initiated the checkout process, they were provided with various membership options, along with an option to checkout without becoming a member.

If users decided to become a member, they’d receive 15% off their order along with “other great year-round benefits.” Benefits of membership should have been displayed on the page so users could make an informed decision about joining. Simply offering membership, with a fee of at least $40, wasn’t enough to entice users to join. One user, while viewing the offer, said, “I’m not going to pay $40.00 to get $5.00 off my book purchase.”

Both users who made purchases on the site chose not to become a member during the checkout process, but they weren’t annoyed with the request. One user said, “It doesn’t surprise me, and it doesn’t offend me or bother me either.”
During the checkout process, the New Hampshire Historical Society gave users the option to become a member and save 15% off their order or to make the purchase without becoming a member.
Maintaining a Relationship with Donors and Volunteers

107. Use confirmation messages to verify donation details.

Similar to a confirmation page that displays after a donation has been submitted (See the Confirmation Page guidelines, beginning on page 178), there are details that must be communicated to donors in a confirmation email message.\(^{11}\)

Information in confirmation email should be given priority and presented in the following order:

- “Thank you”
- Printable receipt
- Tax deduction details
- How the money will be used

The following optional details can be provided afterward, if necessary:

- The name of the charge to expect on a credit card statement, if different than the organization name
- Tracking code or ID number
- Requests to email friends or share on social networks

In a confirmation message sent from UNICEF, some of the required details were included, such as a “thank you,” a printable receipt, and how the money would be used, but most of this information was placed below the optional details, such as links to share the donation with friends on social networks or through email. This information should have been provided below the critical details, which were displaced by these lower-priority calls to action.

\(^{11}\) See our separate report with more general guidelines for confirmation email and other transactional messages. [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/confirmation/]
The confirmation message from UNICEF included some of the required details, but they were displaced by requests to share the donation details with friends and family via social networks or email.
108. If users opted-in to receive additional information during the donation process, use email to build and maintain relationships.

If users choose to receive further email communications during the donation process, messages can be sent to build a stronger relationship with donors. However, messages should be sent strategically, because users don’t want to be bombarded with email. Choose the best times to send email, such as during times of need or times of the year when making donations and volunteering are popular.

For example, the Environmental Defense Fund sent an email requesting donors, volunteers, and advocates to help support their work after a catastrophic oil spill had occurred.

The Environmental Defense Fund sent an email asking for support after an oil spill.

Dear [Name],

The Roseate spoonbill is one of scores of Gulf Coast birds and hundreds of other species at risk.

Please donate now to support our recovery efforts.

The Gulf Coast oil spill is a rapidly evolving catastrophe and there is a lot we don’t yet know about the full magnitude of the ecological devastation. But here is what we do know so far:

- The oil is spilling at a current rate of more than 200,000 gallons of oil per day.
- Recovery and restoration of the wetlands that harbor hundreds of species and provide a natural hurricane barrier will take years or even decades.
- Even before the spill, Louisiana had lost more wetlands since the 1930s -- 2,300 square miles -- than the size of the state of Delaware, leaving the region particularly vulnerable to this oil spill catastrophe.

We’re going to need a lot of help over the coming days, months and years to ramp up our coastal conservation and fisheries work to restore the Gulf Coast to full environmental health.

Here are three things you can do right now to provide assistance to our efforts:

1. Volunteer: Register to provide on-the-ground volunteer assistance with the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana or with National Audubon.
2. Engage Online: Check out our Oil Crisis Response page and follow us on Facebook and Twitter to keep up with the latest news.
3. Donate Now: Support our coordinated oil spill emergency response efforts with a generous donation.

The Environmental Defense Fund sent an email asking for support after an oil spill.
New York Cares sent an email asking for coat drive donations on a cold winter morning. The email asked for donations so the organization could purchase coats, meals, and other items for those in need.

New York Cares sent a timely email during a cold winter day asking for coat drive donations.

Popular times to donate can also be used as the basis for an email. For example, American Cancer Society sent a donation reminder three days before the year-end tax deadline.
The American Cancer Society sent a donation reminder during a popular time of year to give: the year-end tax deadline.

109. **Include donation and/or volunteer calls-to-action in standard newsletters.**

   Email newsletter recipients can be reminded to donate or volunteer in standard newsletters, but the request should be placed in a low-priority area, such as the footer navigation (unless there is a large emphasis on donating or volunteering in a particular newsletter).  

   The Bentley University newsletter included a “Make a Gift to Bentley” call to action in the footer navigation. It was de-emphasized in the footer, but it was still available for those interested in contributing to the university.

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**ONLINE RESOURCES**

- Alumni Career Services  |  Hire a Bentley Grad  |  Make a Gift to Bentley  |  Falcon News
- McCallum Graduate School Info Session Schedule  |  Bentley Bookstore  |  Contact Us

Bentley University included a link to donate in the footer of an email newsletter.

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12 For additional information and guidelines about email newsletter usability, see our separate report on that topic. [http://www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/](http://www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/)
110. **Provide links to the organization’s social network presence within email messages.**

To develop relationships with donors and volunteers on social networks, add links in your newsletter to your social network presence on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Again, ensure that high-priority messages are communicated before these calls-to-action. These can be placed towards the end of the message, such as how a Hoboken Museum newsletter displayed the link to their Facebook page.

The bottom of the Hoboken Museum newsletter included a link to their Facebook page. The newsletter should have also provided a link to Twitter, which is mentioned but not linked. Don’t leave people guessing, especially since it can be hard to locate the correct Twitter account, given that site’s confusing search.

For more information and guidelines about creating a presence on social networks, see the Social Media and Interaction guidelines, beginning on page 110.
Site-Wide Guidelines

This section contains guidelines that can be used throughout charity or non-profit sites and aren’t necessarily related to a specific site area.

111. **Use images that reinforce the charity’s work and help convey information. Avoid using images purely for decoration or aesthetics.**

Several sites we tested used images on the homepage purely for decoration. These types of images take up precious real estate that can be used for more important information or meaningful graphics. Graphics that show real content can complement the site’s text and make it more interesting and appealing to users.

The Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis site had images of people across the top of the page. These images caught the attention of users but quickly confused them. One user said, “There are pictures of people at the top, but I don’t know who they are at this point. Are they people with MS? It doesn’t say anything about them.” Another user said, “I’m pretty drawn to people’s faces, and the variety of different people is appealing. I’m not sure if these people have MS or work for this project.”

The images of people at the top of the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis homepage confused users.

Although this site used poor imagery on the homepage, they used an information graphic to communicate their research efforts on another page of the site. While one user was reviewing their work, she came across the Cure Map Diagram, which displayed where the organization was in their research process. This user found the graphic very helpful, and said, “They have a diagram which shows how they’ve broken down the five different causes that contribute to MS and the four different phases, and then they have ‘complete’ listed. That’s a cool graphic. It shows that progress is being made in finding a cure or treatment ... The cure map breaks down the research that’s necessary for each phase of the disease.”
The Cure Map on the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis communicated where the organization was in their research process.

The New Hampshire Food Bank featured a graphic related to a hair show in the middle of their homepage, which confused a couple users who visited the site. One said, “Now this is a food bank site, so I’m not sure what the hair competition is about.” Another user said, “What does the hair show have to do with this? That’s weird.”
The advertisement for a hair competition on the New Hampshire Food Bank homepage confused users.

112. Avoid using stock photography.

Users were put-off by imagery that appeared to be fake or overly-staged. If images are used, particularly those of people, ensure that they are truly involved with the organization: donors, leaders, or people who have benefited from the organization are good candidates to include in imagery.

The images of “students” on the Southern New Hampshire University website bothered one user. She said, “They are trying to be multi-cultural and ethnically diverse, right on the front page. That doesn’t really appeal to me. I think they are trying too hard to be politically correct.” She compared that with the images of students and donors on the University of New Hampshire website, which were paired with stories about the individuals. She said, “The website seems a little more genuine. I like that this one has personal stories about people, about donors, and the decisions that they make.”
Present information in a way that supports scanning.

Our research has shown that users don’t read word for word on the Web. Instead, they skim pages trying to pick out a few sentences or words that hold the information they want.

People prefer information that is short and to the point. They don’t want to be overloaded people with too much text. Websites should support people’s online reading behaviors by providing key elements that facilitate scanning, such as headings, subheadings, large type, bold text, highlighted text, and
bulleted lists. Content that is properly formatted will encourage people to read more about the organization.

One user, while trying to learn about the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis, was annoyed when she reached the About page, because it was a large wall of text. She said, “I don’t want to have to read a lot of information. I like to have smaller bits of information that I can click on to get more.”

The About page on the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis was a daunting wall of text, which discouraged users from reading.
Another user, while viewing information on the *Hate Crimes* page on the Interfaith Alliance’s website, said, “It doesn’t have anything in between to break it out to make it more interesting, like pictures of what they’re doing. Although they have stuff on the side to click on, it’d be helpful to have a video right on the page directly related to the topic.”

The Interfaith Alliance calls on our members and all Americans to urge the United States Congress to pass comprehensive hate crimes legislation. Those who value religious pluralism must send a strong, unified message that democratic and religious values call for equal protection for all people to be free from attacks motivated by bigotry. Religion and government must work together to create an America in which diverse people are safe as well as free.

**Why Do We Need This Legislation:**

Crimes motivated by hatred or bigotry are an assault not only upon individual victims’ freedoms, but also upon a belief that lies at the core of our diverse faith traditions—that every human being is endowed with dignity and worth. Every American should enjoy the strongest possible guarantee of freedom from attacks motivated by bigotry.

- The US Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of a hate crimes bill that define when a person’s bigoted thoughts or speech turn into a crime against another person or persons.
- As of 2006, five states do not have hate crimes laws covering individuals (Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, and Wyoming). Among states that have hate crimes laws, some communities are protected, while some are not.
- Since 1991, the FBI has documented almost 100,000 hate crimes. During that period, however, the Justice Department has filed fewer than 73 cases under the current, narrow federal law. And a new government report states that the real number of hate crimes in the United States is more than 15 times higher than FBI statistics reflect.
- According to FBI statistics, hate crimes most often target people because of their race, religion, and sexual orientation.
- To view a report from the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights documenting the “Human Face of Hate Crimes,” please click here

**What Will This Legislation Do:**

Democratic and religious values call for equal protection for all people in all places. National hate crimes legislation will help ensure equal protection under the law for all Americans.

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114. Avoid using organization-centric terms.

Some websites we tested used made-up terms, jargon, and internal names, which confused users. Don't assume users understand these terms. If they must be used, they should be explicitly explained.

One user, while viewing the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis website, noticed the use of “cure map” on their About Us page, and said: “They have a process called ‘cure map’ but that doesn’t mean anything to me.”

In this case, the term was hyperlinked, and she clicked on the link to get more information about the name of their research program. It would have been better to include a brief explanation in context, as well as providing a link to additional information.

The use of the term “cure map” on the Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis’ About page confused users.

The “I Have A Dream” foundation referred to the children in their programs as “dreamers,” which confused one user, because she didn’t have a firm grasp on what
the organization did. She said, “They are calling the kids ‘dreamers.’ What is it that they give these kids to call them ‘dreamers?’”

**115. Don’t place essential information in PDF documents.**

In our previous studies, we’ve found that users don’t like downloading and reading information in PDF files. Users often get lost inside PDF files, which are typically big, linear files that are good for print, but unpleasant to read and navigate online.

One user in our study was trying to understand how the Children’s Scholarship Fund worked and navigated to their *Results* page. She clicked on a link titled *The Effects of School Choice: An Evaluation of the Charlotte Children’s Scholarship Fund*, which launched a PDF. She said, “I’m just scanning this, because it looks like a lot of information. This would be presented better if it were visual.” She quickly closed the PDF and moved onto another page in the site.

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**results**

*Evaluations of CSF Partner Programs*

- **An Evaluation of the Children's Scholarship Fund, Harvard University** *(PDF)*
  This evaluation reports on the results of a telephone survey administered to more than 2,300 CSF applicant families and reports high levels of satisfaction among parents using scholarships to send their children to private schools.

- **Test-score Effects of School Vouchers in Dayton, OH; New York City; and Washington, D.C.: Evidence from Randomized Field Trials** *(PDF)*
  This evaluation of CSF programs in three cities shows that scholarships narrow the achievement gap in math and reading between African-American and white students by about half. Conducted by William G. Howell, University of Wisconsin, Patrick J. Wolf, Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell, Harvard University.

- **CSF Baltimore: Academic Performance of Scholarship Recipients in the 2005-2006 School Year** *(PDF)*
  Assessment of the academic performance of students who received scholarships during the 2005-2006 academic school year.

- **Using Experimental Economics to Measure the Effects of A Natural Educational Experiment on Altruism (Northwest Ohio Children's Scholarship Fund)** *(PDF)*
  Analysis of the effects participation in a scholarship program on parents’ and students’ altruism and attitudes. Conducted by Eric Bettinger & Robert Slonim, Case Western Reserve University.

- **The Effects of School Choice: An Evaluation of the Charlotte Children's Scholarship Fund Program** *(PDF)*
  Study of the impact scholarships have on the test scores of recipient students. Conducted by Jay P. Greene.

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The links on the *Results* page launched PDF files, which made it difficult for users to locate essential information.

Another user in our study was interested in the recovery plan for the Ivory-Billed Woodpeckers on the Defenders of Wildlife website. He clicked a link titled *recovery*
plan for the ivory-billed woodpecker, which launched a PDF that was 182 pages long. As he scrolled through the document, he became frustrated and said, “I would not necessarily read all of that, but I would read whatever plan they had to help the animal. I would probably print this and read it offline. I like to get brief flashes of information on the Web, and if I need to read something long, I’ll print it out and read it [offline].”

Both links to the recovery plan for ivory-billed woodpeckers opened a lengthy PDF document that was difficult to parse.

116. Use a readable font, and ensure adequate contrast between the background and text.

Reading onscreen is much more difficult than reading printed material. Remember your target audience when selecting font sizes. Choose sharp, crisp fonts. We recommend using 12-point fonts. When possible, use fonts that are optimized for onscreen reading. Sans-serif fonts, such as Verdana, are easiest to read onscreen.

Maximize legibility by using highly contrasting text and background colors. For optimal legibility, we recommend using black text on a white (or very light gray) background.

Large fonts and clear contrast are particularly important for sites with many elderly users, but our research with younger users (such as teenagers and college students) has found that young people also prefer text with good legibility. Young eyes may still be keen enough to cope with less-legible text, but young users tell us that they prefer not having to bother.
Users made comments about text size and contrast throughout our study. One user, while viewing the *Who We Are* page on the Boys & Girls Club of America website, said, “I like this website. When I need to read something, I prefer white backgrounds and black letters, or at least dark letters.”

One user thought the *Who We Are* page on the Boys & Girls Club of America website had proper contrast between font and background colors.

Another user struggled to read the tiny, poorly contrasted font on the Corcoran Gallery of Art entry page, which only appeared when she placed her mouse over the image to the right. She said, “The text on the left is popping in and out, and it’s really tiny print for this big white space.”

The grey font on the left hand side of the page was too small, and there wasn’t enough contrast with the white background.
## WEBSITES TESTED

We tested the websites of a variety of 60 non-profits and charities. The table below includes the organization names and URLs included in our study.

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<thead>
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<th>Website</th>
<th>URL</th>
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<tr>
<td>4-H</td>
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<td>Accelerated Cure Project for Multiple Sclerosis</td>
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<td>The Adoption Exchange</td>
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<td>WaterStone</td>
<td><a href="http://www.waterstone.org">http://www.waterstone.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wentworth-Gardner and Tobias Lear Houses</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wentworthgardnerandlear.org">http://www.wentworthgardnerandlear.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife Alliance</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wildlifealliance.org">http://www.wildlifealliance.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, we tested the Facebook pages of six organizations. The table below includes the organization names and Facebook URLs included in our study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Facebook URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Red Cross</td>
<td><a href="http://www.facebook.com/redcross">http://www.facebook.com/redcross</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make-A-Wish Foundation of America</td>
<td><a href="http://www.facebook.com/makeawish">http://www.facebook.com/makeawish</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.facebook.com/peta">http://www.facebook.com/peta</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
METHODOLOGY

The usability sessions included in both rounds of research were held in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In our first round of research, each session lasted 60 minutes. In our second round of research, each session lasted 90 minutes. In each session, we gave users tasks to perform. The facilitator asked users to think aloud, or explain what they were doing as they were doing it, as they worked through each task. The facilitator sat next to the user, observed, and took notes as the participant attempted tasks on various charity and non-profit websites.

Users completed tasks on a computer using Windows Vista and Internet Explorer (Version 7). Sessions were recorded using Morae, which recorded the screen and mouse movements, as well as facial expressions and comments from participants. To ensure consistency, the same facilitator ran all sessions in both studies.

Tasks and Questionnaires: First Study

Task 1: Use organizational websites to research two non-profit/charities and choose one to donate to

The moderator gave each participant two similar non-profit or charity organizations to research. She gave users 10-15 minutes to conduct some research on the two organizations using their websites, which were bookmarked in the browser. Users were asked to choose one of the two organizations to make a small donation to.

The two organizations given to the user had similar missions and goals so users could make a fair comparison between the two; for example, users weren’t asked to choose between a medical research non-profit and a youth enrichment non-profit.

- Task description (given to users): Review these two websites and decide on the best organization to make a donation to:
  <non-profit/charity 1>: www.org1.org
  <non-profit/charity 2>: www.org2.org
  The sites are bookmarked in the browser.

Task 2: Make a small donation to the non-profit or charity chosen in the previous task

The second task was to make a small donation ($10–15) to the charity or non-profit they chose in the previous task. Users were required to use their own credit card to make the donation; the donation was reimbursed at the end of the session. (Users were told they would be required to do this during the recruiting process.)

- Task description (given to users): Please use your credit card to give a $10 donation to one of the charities you just reviewed.

Questionnaire (given after Task 2 was completed)

After choosing one of two non-profit or charity sites to make a donation to and completing the donation using the organization’s website, users were asked to fill out two questionnaires: one questionnaire for each site.
We asked users to evaluate each site they visited on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

- Satisfaction
- Ease of use
- Understanding/Comprehension

Each participant completed Task 1 and Task 2 twice, evaluating a total of four organizations. After tasks were completed, participants answered some interview questions about the websites they visited during the session.

**Tasks and Questionnaires: Second Study**

**Task 1: Research a non-profit/charity and determine trustworthiness**

The moderator gave each participant a non-profit or charity organization to research and evaluate. She gave each user about five minutes to conduct some research on the organization’s website, which was bookmarked in the browser.

- Task description (given to users): Find out what <non-profit/charity> does and decide whether or not they are trustworthy.

**Questionnaire**

We asked users to evaluate the website and organization they researched on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

- Ease of understanding
- Writing
- Design
- Frustration while completing the task
- Trustworthiness

**Post-Task Questions**

- What made you think this organization was trustworthy/not trustworthy?
- What did you think about how the organization described what they did?
- Do you have any unanswered questions? Is there anything you want to know about the organization that you couldn’t find?
- After reviewing information about the organization, would you be interested in donating to them? Why or why not?

**Task 2: Use organizational websites to research two non-profit/charities and make a donation to one**

This task was similar the two tasks given to users in the first study, but the organizations chosen for the tasks were different.

The moderator gave each participant two similar non-profit or charity organizations to research. She gave users 10–15 minutes to conduct some research on the two organizations’ websites, which were bookmarked in the browser. Once users had chosen an organization to donate to, they were asked to complete the process.
• Task description (given to users): Review the websites of the following two organizations and decide on the best organization to make a donation to. Make a small donation ($5-10) to the organization of your choice using your credit card. You will be fully reimbursed for the donation you make:
<non-profit/charity 1>: www.org1.org
<non-profit/charity 2>: www.org2.org
The sites are bookmarked in the browser.

*Questionnaires*

After choosing one of two non-profit or charity sites to make a donation to and completing the donation using the organization’s website, users were asked to fill out three questionnaires: one questionnaire about the information on each site and another questionnaire about the donation process.

We asked users to evaluate the websites and organizations they visited on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

- Ease of understanding
- Writing
- Design
- Frustration while completing the task
- Trustworthiness

Additionally, we asked each user to evaluate the donation process on the site they used to make a donation. Users evaluated the following attributes on a 7-point scale:

- Ease of use
- Frustration while completing the task
- Comfort

*Post-Task Questions*

Asked for each site:

- What was your overall impression of the site?
- What are some things you liked about the site?
- Was there anything the site could do to improve?
- Was there anything you didn’t like?
- Was there anything that confused you?
- What made you think this organization was trustworthy/not trustworthy?

Asked about selecting an organization to donate to:

- Which site did a better job of informing you about what you were interested in?
- What made you decide to donate to the organization you chose?
- Was one site more convincing than the other? If so, how?
Asked about the donation process:

- What did you like about the donation process?
- What would make the process better?

**Task 3: Find out how to make a non-monetary donation to a charity or non-profit organization.**

Participants were instructed to find a way to donate tangible items, such as pet food, used toys and books, non-perishable goods, and clothing to a non-profit or charity of their choice. They weren’t directed to a specific site; they used the Web to complete the task.

- Task description (given to users): You’d like to give some <non-monetary item> to an organization that distributes these items to people in need. Use the Web to find out how and where you can do this.

**Questionnaire**

We asked users to evaluate the organization and site they visited on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

- Ease of use
- Frustration while completing the task
- Comfort
- Trustworthiness

**Post-Task Questions**

- What made you choose this charity/non-profit to donate to?
- What did you think about completing this process?
- What did you like the process?
- What would make the process better?

**Task 4: Purchase a product**

Participants were instructed to purchase an item for themselves using a site selected for the study. The sites were bookmarked in the browser.

- Task description (given to users): Purchase an item for yourself. You will be fully reimbursed for the item you purchase.

**Questionnaire**

We asked users to evaluate the site and purchasing process on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

- Ease of use
- Frustration while completing the task
- Satisfaction
- Comfort

**Post-Task Questions**

- Will any proceeds from your purchase go directly to the organization?
Task 5: Find a way to volunteer
Participants were instructed to find information about volunteering at an organization selected for the study. The sites were bookmarked in the browser.

• Task description (given to users): Find information about how to contribute some of your time to <non-profit/charity name>.

Questionnaire
We asked users to evaluate the site they visited on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

• Ease of use
• Frustration while completing the task

Post-Task Questions

• What made you choose this charity/non-profit to volunteer for?
• What did you like about completing this task?
• What would make the process better?

Task 6: Donate to a charity you regularly donate to.
The facilitator asked users to donate to a charity or non-profit that they made regular donations to. Eight out of nine participants in the second study completed this task.

• Task description (given to users): Make a small donation ($5-10) to an organization you regularly donate to. You will be fully reimbursed for the donation you make.

Questionnaire
We asked users to evaluate the donation process on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

• Ease of use
• Frustration while completing the task
• Comfort

Post-Task Questions

• Why did you choose to donate to this charity/non-profit on a regular basis?
• How frequently do you donate to this organization?
• What did you like about the donation process?
• What would make the process better?
Task 7: Use Facebook to research two non-profit/charities and make a donation to one.

If time permitted, the moderator gave each participant two similar non-profit or charity organizations to research using Facebook. Users were instructed to research the organizations and make a donation to one.

Three out of nine users researched organizations on Facebook, and one user made a donation on Facebook.

- Task description (given to users): Use Facebook to review the following two organizations and decide on the best organization to make a donation to. Make a small donation ($5-10) to the charity of your choice using your credit card. You will be fully reimbursed for the donation you make.

  <non-profit/charity 1>
  <non-profit/charity 2>

  Each organization’s Facebook page is bookmarked in the browser.

Questionnaire

After choosing one of two non-profit or charity sites to make a donation to and completing the donation using Facebook, users were asked to fill out three questionnaires: one questionnaire about the information on each organization’s Facebook page and another questionnaire about the donation process.

We asked users to evaluate each organization and its Facebook page on a 7-point scale for the following attributes:

- Ease of understanding
- Writing
- Design
- Frustration while completing the task
- Trustworthiness

Additionally, we asked each user to evaluate the donation process on the organization’s Facebook page. Users evaluated attributes on a 7-point scale:

- Ease of use
- Frustration while completing the task
- Comfort

Post-Task Questions

Asked for each site:

- What was your overall impression of the organization’s page on Facebook?
- What were some things you liked about the organization’s page on Facebook?
- How did the information about the organization on Facebook compare to the information you saw on organizational sites in the previous tasks?
• Would you consider using Facebook to make a donation in the future? Why or why not?
• Was there anything that could be improved?
• Was there anything you didn’t like?
• Was there anything that confused you?
• What made you think this organization was trustworthy/not trustworthy?

Asked about selecting an organization to donate to:
• Which organization did a better job of informing you about what you were interested in?
• What made you decide to donate to the organization you chose?
• Was one organization more convincing than the other? If so, how?

Asked about the donation process:
• What did you like about the donation process?
• What would make the process better?
• How did the donation process on Facebook compare to the donation process you completed in the previous task?

Post-Test Questions

Study 1
In our first study, we didn’t ask any post-task questions. Instead, we waited until the end of the study and asked a series of post-test questions.
• What are the things you’d need to know about a charity before you make a donation? Did the sites you visited answer those questions?
• For the first two charity sites you visited:
  • What was your overall impression of site A/site B?
  • What were some things you liked about site A/site B?
  • What were some things you disliked about site A/site B?
  • Which site did a better job of informing you about what you were interested in, site A/B?
  • Is there anything Site A/Site B could do to improve?
  • What made you choose charity A over charity B?

For the second two charity sites you visited:
• What was your overall impression of site A/site B?
• What were some things you liked about site A/site B?
• What were some things you disliked about site A/site B?
• Which site did a better job of informing you about what you were interested in, site A/B?
• Is there anything Site A/Site B could do to improve?
• What made you choose charity A over charity B?

**Study 2**
In our second study, we asked users a series of post-test questions, which were broken into categories.

**Donation History**
- When was the last time you made a donation?
- What was the last organization you donated to?
- What prompted you to make the donation?
- On average, how many donations do you make per year?
- When do you typically give donations?
- Are there any organizations/types of organizations you prefer to make donations to? Why?
- Are there any sites you’ve had a good or bad experiences on when finding information about an organization or making a donation? Please explain.

**Organizational Websites vs. Facebook**
- What did you think about the information about organizations available on Facebook?
- How did the information about the organization on Facebook compare to the information on an organization’s website?
- Have you ever made a donation through Facebook in the past? Why or why not?
- [If user answered no in previous question, ask] Now that you have made a donation (as part of the study), is this something you might do on your own in the future? Why or why not?
- Was it easier or harder to make a donation through Facebook vs. an organization’s website?

**Information Needed/Biggest Turnoffs**
- What do you need to know about an organization before you feel comfortable donating to them?
- In your opinion, what information is the most convincing when you are considering making a donation to an organization?
- Is there anything on or about an organization’s website that makes you not want to donate to them? If yes, what? Why?

**Donation Process**
- What did you think about the donation processes on the sites you used?
- Is there anything you liked? Anything you think could be improved?
- How did the donation process compare to your experience with purchasing products on other sites?
**Purchasing Process**

- What did you think about the purchasing process on [organization name]’s website?
- Is there anything you liked? Anything you think could be improved?
- How did the purchasing process compare to your experience with purchasing products on other sites?

**Volunteering History/Volunteering Process**

- Have you ever volunteered for a charity/non-profit in the past?
- If yes, what was the last organization you volunteered for?
- What prompted you to volunteer for them?
- On average, how often do you volunteer per year?
- When do you typically volunteer?
- Are there any organizations/types of organizations you prefer to volunteer for? If yes, which ones and why?
- What did you think about the volunteering process on [organization]’s website?
- Is there anything you liked? Anything you think could be improved?

**Participants**

We recruited people who had a range of Internet experience, from relative novices (1–2 years) to more experienced users (3+ years).

We screened out any participants who were “technical experts,” such as IT personnel, programmers, or Web or software engineers, since they have expert knowledge in using the Web. We also screened out any participants who worked at a non-profit or charity organization, because they have expert knowledge about these types of organizations.

**First Study**

A total of 12 people participated in the study, all from the United States. Participants’ ages ranged from 20–61, and there were 7 men and 5 women.

Study participants had diverse occupations, including:

- Assistant Vice President of a bank
- Attorney
- Database Analyst
- Financial Advisor
- General Contractor
- Microbiologist
- Police Officer
- Professional Photographer
- Sales Representative
- Server
- Small Business Owner
- Teacher
All users were required to:

- Have made a donation (online or via mail) to a non-profit or charity in the 12 months prior to the study.
- Be willing to make small donations to non-profits or charities using their credit card during the session. They were fully reimbursed for the contributions made during the study.

At least six participants were required to:

- Have made a donation online using the organization’s website in the 12 months prior to the study. (Seven out of 12 participants met this requirement.)

Second Study

A total of nine people participated in the second study, all from the United States. Participants’ ages ranged from 20–59, and there were 4 men and 5 women.

Study participants had diverse occupations, including:

- Baker
- Business Analyst
- Lecturer
- Political/Campaign Worker
- Respiratory Therapist
- Retail Associate
- Small Business Owner
- Special Educator
- Wedding Coordinator

In our second study, we wanted to ensure we had a strong mix of users who had varying experience with and frequency of online giving, volunteering, and online purchasing. Additionally, we recruited users who donated to a mix of international, national, and local non-profits and charities.

We used the following criteria to locate appropriate people for the study:

All users were required to:

- Have made an online donation to a non-profit or charity in the 12 months prior to the study
- Be willing to make small donations (no more than $40 total) to non-profits or charities using their credit card during the session. They were fully reimbursed for the contributions made during the study.

At least six participants were required to:

- Have volunteered at a non-profit or charity in the three years prior to the study. (All nine participants met this requirement.)
- Have a Facebook account that they logged into at least several times per week. (Eight out of nine participants met this requirement.)

At least three participants were required to:

- Make regular donations to the same charity. (All nine participants met this requirement.)
• Work for an organization that matched donations to a non-profit/charity. (We were unable to recruit anyone who met this requirement.)

ABOUT USING THIS METHODOLOGY

After planning and conducting the first study, we learned some lessons that helped inform our second study. When planning for the second study, we kept the following things in mind:

Participant requirements

The participants in our first study provided many insights and clearly communicated what they liked and didn’t like about the information and donation processes on non-profit and charities websites.

However, in our second study, we made a stronger effort to recruit a wide range of participants that had varying frequencies of making donations, volunteering, and making online purchases. This allowed us to gain a range of perspectives from users who had varying levels of involvement with non-profit and charity organizations. (For example, some were frequent donors and volunteers and other only donated or volunteered once or twice per year.) Additionally, we wanted to recruit users who had involvement with varying non-profits and charities (size, work, and areas served).

Task variation

In our first study, we tested two tasks: 1) research two similar non-profits/charities and 2) make a donation to one. When planning our second study, we wanted to incorporate additional tasks, such as asking users to donate non-monetary goods, volunteer, and make purchases. We also asked users to review non-profit information on Facebook, as well as make donations through that site.

Variety of organizations to research and donate to

Each user in our first study was able to choose a “type” of organization to research and donate to. Once they chose a type, the facilitator gave them the names of two organizations they were to use to complete the tasks. Some users were very interested in the organizations they were asked to research and donate to, and others were not.

For our second study, we tried to select organizations that would appeal to a broad audience. However, we ran into the same problem in the second study; some users were interested in donating to, volunteering at, or purchasing from the organizations we selected and others were not. In our next round of research, we plan to include more open-ended tasks that allow users to choose the specific organizations they want to engage with.

Future considerations

After the planning and conducting the second study, we have some additional items to consider in the next round of research:

Session length

In the next round of research, we plan to allow more time to complete tasks and ask follow-up questions. Although we had 90-minute sessions in the second round of
research, it was difficult to get through all the tasks on time. In the next round of research, we plan to allot two hours per session.

**Additional research areas**

Although we covered a wide range of topics in our second study, there are additional areas we’d like to research in the next round of research, which includes, but is not limited to: gaining advocates, making donations with matching contributions, and obtaining larger gifts or contributions. (Note: although we tried to recruit users who had employers that matched donations, we were unable to meet the recruiting requirement.)
About the Authors

**Janelle Estes** is a User Experience Specialist with Nielsen Norman Group. She works with clients in a variety of industries and presents regularly about usability methods, email newsletters, writing for the Web, and the user experience of non-profit websites. She has been the primary researcher on and co-author of several NN/g reports: email newsletters, transactional email messages, donation usability for non-profit and charity websites, and social media. Prior to joining NN/g, Estes was a research associate on the Customer Experience team at Forrester Research, where she was involved with many research efforts related to user experience and user centered design. Additionally, Estes has worked as a user experience consultant with companies across many industries, including retail, financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, and telecommunications. Most recently, Estes worked at Chordiant Software as a Human Factors Engineer in an agile development environment. Estes holds a BS in Information Design and Corporate Communication and an MS in Human Factors in Information Design, both from Bentley University.

**Dr. Jakob Nielsen** ([www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)) is a principal of Nielsen Norman Group. He is the founder of the “discount usability engineering” movement, which emphasizes fast and efficient methods for improving the quality of user interfaces. Nielsen, noted as “the world’s leading expert on Web usability” by *U.S. News and World Report* and “the next best thing to a true time machine” by *USA TODAY*, is the author of the bestselling book *Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity* (2000), which has sold more than a quarter of a million copies in 22 languages. His other books include *Hypertext and Hypermedia* (1990), *Usability Engineering* (1993), *Usability Inspection Methods* (1994), *International User Interfaces* (1996), *Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed* (2001), *Prioritizing Web Usability* (2006), and *Eyetracking Web Usability* (2009). Nielsen’s Alertbox column on Web usability has been published on the Internet since 1995 and currently has about 200,000 readers. From 1994 to 1998, Nielsen was a Sun Microsystems Distinguished Engineer. His previous affiliations include Bell Communications Research, the Technical University of Denmark, and the IBM User Interface Institute. He holds 79 US patents, mainly on ways of making the Internet easier to use.
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