

# **NONPROFIT** WEBSITES

## NONPROFIT WEBSITE PLANNING GUIDE

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1

CREATE A COMPLETE NONPROFIT WEBSITE THAT  
ATTRACTS NEW DONORS, MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS.

# INTRODUCTION

**Congratulations on downloading the Nonprofit Website Planning Guide!** This guide was created specifically for nonprofit organizations that are seeking to either design a new website or redesign their current website. But, most importantly, the guide is designed to help you create a more effective, intentional web presence than ever before.

The guide is divided into easy-to-follow steps that anyone can use. However, we recommend involving your senior leadership in the earlier sections of the guide in order to actively collaborate and ensure that all of the information that needs to be presented to the world is represented. Then, we will ask you to assign one person to make the creative decisions from that point forward, working with creative professionals to ensure that the perfect image and content is published.

We don't want to waste your time with tons of introductory content, so let's get started right away. **If you find yourself lost or feel that you need help creating the blueprint for your organization's web presence, skip to the information in the last section.**

Let's begin.

# STEP 1: PLAN YOUR WEBSITE'S STRUCTURE

Think of your website like a magazine. Your **homepage** (the front page of your website) is the cover of the online “magazine” that highlights the most important items inside. Like opening a magazine, clicking on any link on the homepage leads visitors to a “page” on your website that contains more information about the item they clicked on.

So, just like you have to plan your articles and inside pages before you can create a cover for it, a website’s “inside” pages must be planned before you can know what should be on the homepage.

Let’s begin by creating what is referred to as a sitemap. A sitemap is simply an outline of the pages of your website and shows how they are related to each other.

3

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## EXAMPLE SITEMAP

Here is an example of a simple, generic nonprofit organization sitemap:

- Homepage
  - Upcoming Events
  - Latest News
  - Welcome Video
- How We Serve
  - Feeding the Homeless
  - Housing

- Education
- Get Involved
  - Training Schedule
  - Upcoming Events
  - Volunteer With Us
- Donations
  - Why Consider Giving?
  - Donate Now
  - Secure Donor Center
- Who We Are
  - Mission / Vision Video
  - Mission & Vision
  - Our Dedicated Team
  - Board of Directors
  - Contact Us

**One VERY IMPORTANT point to understand about your nonprofit website is that its primary purpose is to attract new visitors to your nonprofit.** Period. Over 90% of the website traffic you will receive will be brand new visitors while less than 10% of website traffic will be attributed to repeat visitors. In addition, your website should cater to what your website visitors are searching for, not what you necessarily want to lead with. So be sure that you are making decisions based on their needs, not your aesthetic or presentation preferences.

## QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

What does that tell you about the importance of your NEW VISITORS page?

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What does that tell you about your homepage and what it should emphasize?

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Gather all of your materials together. Gather your logo, pictures you want to publish on the website, sales materials, membership information, and donor solicitations – just about anything you have ever written about your organization that is not dated. Catalog this information into categories of information.

For example, all of the basic information about your organization, such as history, mission statements, and contact information should be placed in a pile called 'About Us.' However, information about your products and services should be placed in a pile called 'Products.'

Once you determine the information you have ready to present, and what general categories they belong to, you can begin creating your sitemap.

## STEP 2: PLAN YOUR HOMEPAGE

The homepage is the “cover” of your website. It needs to contain references to the latest, greatest and newest information contained within your website. For example, your homepage **should not** contain your mission statement or too many details about your upcoming event. But, it **should** contain “teaser” information and links that direct people to full pages within your website about specific events and details about your organization’s mission.

Determine what type of “teaser” information you would like to place on the homepage and write it down. Be careful not to create a homepage that is too busy with more than 5-6 points of information. Otherwise, the clutter will lose most website visitors.

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### WHAT I WANT ON MY WEBSITE

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## STEP 3: CHOOSE A DOMAIN NAME

Your domain name is a unique name that identifies your website, like google.com or redcross.org. It serves as your address on the web, similar to your street address in the real world. You will want to begin choosing one as the first step of your website planning process.

- Choose a memorable name. Stay away from abbreviated names that are difficult to remember.
- If your organization's name is not available, find a name that best describes what you do. For example, if redcross.org is not available, try medicalcharity.org or disasterrelief.com.
- Go to <http://www.netministry.com/domains> to check on the availability of your domain name before finalizing your choice.
- Try to think of multiple domain names and alternate TLDs (Top Level Domains, such as .com, .org, .net, etc.) and consider registering them all.

7

### YOUR DOMAIN NAME LIST

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Once you have chosen your domain name, you are ready for step four.



## STEP 4: DETAIL ALL SPECIAL FEATURES

What makes a website different from a brochure is that it can actually interact with the reader. Interaction is handled by technology that is referred to as an **application**. In order to ensure that we know what you want your website to do beyond simply presenting information, you will want to write down the various “special functions” you feel it needs. For example, you may want to be able to take online orders or donations. You may want visitors to register for an e-mail newsletter subscription. Whatever you choose, you will want to make a list of the functionality you need.

## FUNCTIONALITY MY WEBSITE NEEDS

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10

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## STEP 5: FIND WEBSITES YOU LIKE

Now that you have a great domain name, it is time to do some web surfing. Go to <http://www.google.com> and search for organizations that perform similar functions to yours. For example, if you have a pregnancy center, type in the keyword “pregnancy center.” If you are a charity, you might type in “homeless charity” or “world hunger.” What you are looking for is websites that can serve as an inspiration for your website. You can also type in “best nonprofit websites” and find many lists of websites that companies and individuals have made to use as examples of great websites.

You can also go to our website <http://www.nonprofitwebsites.com> and click on our creative portfolio link at the top. This will save you hours of searching and provide you with more than enough to reference.

**Stop when you have found three to five sites. More than five websites will make it difficult for the designer working on your website to determine what you are looking for.** Write down what you like about each website so that your designer can create a unique design combining the best of each site.

11

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### WEBSITES THAT INSPIRE ME

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## STEP 6: WRITE YOUR CONTENT

Your website will most likely need some new **content** to be written. Content is the term for the words, pictures, images, graphics and media that are placed on each of the pages. The best way to organize your website content is to create one MS Word per page of your website. Write all of your information on each document and save it in a folder with the images for that page. Once you have folders for each page, simply create a zip file of all of your folders and send it to your design team.

Be sure to have someone proofread everything you write. Spelling mistakes on your website can damage the impact of your presentation and cause negative opinions about who you are and how competent your team is.

You can begin the process of designing your website and write your content as you wait. As your designer completes the various rounds of revisions and tweaks, you can provide them with all of the content files you have so they can begin typesetting and configuring your individual pages.

12

Once all of your content is up, it is typical to do a sweep of the website and make tons of adjustments. You might find that the information doesn't flow well or that a page needs to be added to your presentation. Just know that the building of your website is an interactive, ongoing process.

It doesn't have to be perfect in order to launch. In fact, once you have the website 80% done, launch it. It will help apply the pressure you need to get the remaining 20% done fast because your team will know that you are live.

All in all, be passionate in the language you use on your website. Have fun with the process of assembling all the pieces, get it all on your website, then make tweaks and adjustments. Advancing and continually improving your content is the subject of our Killer Nonprofit Content Strategy, downloadable at our website.

Here are a few questions to get you started:

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#### QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- Who is the best person in your organization to write your website content?
- Who is the best person to take and find photographs?
- Who is the best person to compile audio and video content?
- Who is the best person to actually use your website software to place the content on the new website?

## STEP 7: UNDERSTAND SOCIAL MEDIA & ONLINE MARKETING

There has been much confusion about the function of social media for nonprofit organizations. We understand how social media can seem to be the perfect vehicle for free online marketing. But once nonprofit organizations start using it, they find it very difficult to measure any form of return on investment. This has caused tremendous frustration for nonprofits that have bet their entire marketing plan on the promise of Facebook, Twitter and other networks.

For a moment, envision your website as the virtual headquarters for your nonprofit organization. Social media pages and feeds serve as outposts that drive people back to your headquarters. When properly used, the success of social media is measured by very specific goals, such as traffic to your website, number of e-mail update subscriptions, total donations made from a donor campaign, etc.

14

Your social pages and accounts should mirror the look, feel and tone of your website. Announcements and events posted to your website's calendar should also be shared on your social media feeds. Always see your website as the first place the information needs to be updated, then share it to social media to drive people back to your website. The biggest reason for this is that, unlike your Facebook page, you completely control your website's presentation and have visitors completely attentive to what you are saying. This provides you with the greatest chance to capture names, contact information, donations, volunteer inquiries and much more.

## STEP 8: GET HELP PLANNING & BUILDING YOUR NONPROFIT WEBSITE

For most executive directors and organization leaders, the process of planning their website is the very last thing they have time for. Even if they can devote a full day to complete the website, someone must still write the content, design the graphics and templates, and then actually create an excellent website. This demands more human resources and time – the two most precious assets of any nonprofit organization – than they may have.

We understand these constraints and are ready to help with any portion of your website planning or development needs. Contact us today for a **Nonprofit Website Blueprint**, created specifically for your organization. We have helped more than 60,000 nonprofit organizations all over the world with planning, marketing, web sites, landing pages and consulting. We want to serve you next.

15



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