



Nonprofit SEO Starter Checklist: get found on Google, the basics made simple

A plain-language SEO checklist for nonprofits, with pro notes so your web team can verify every step.

Built for: Board members, staff and web teams

- ✓ Setup & keywords
- ✓ Local & technical
- ✓ Pages & content
- ✓ AI search & results

[Visit Mission Web Agency](#)

1

The challenge

Many nonprofit sites rarely appear on Google, so the people who need them can't find them.

2

What it covers

16 areas, from Google setup and keywords to local search, AI search and results.

3

How to use it

Plain checks for everyone, grey SEO pro notes for the web team. Tick what's true.

4

The result

Solid SEO foundations, and a clear list of what to improve next.

HOW GOOGLE WORKS

Three steps from your page to a search result

STEP 1 · FINDING

Finds your pages

Its crawler follows links and your sitemap to find pages.

Crawling: Googlebot, internal links, XML sitemap

STEP 2 · UNDERSTANDING

Reads and stores them

It reads text, headings and images, and files the page in its index.

Indexing: canonicals, noindex, rendering

STEP 3 · SHOWING

Shows the best answer

It shows pages that best match what each searcher wants.

Ranking: relevance, quality, experience, location

SEO IN ONE SENTENCE

SEO is making your website **easy for search engines to find, understand and trust**, so it appears when people search for what you offer.

BEFORE YOU START

What do you want to be found for?

Tick each goal that matters to you. Each one needs a page that answers it well.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Our organization's name
e.g. riverside food bank | ☐ Our location
e.g. food bank near me | ☐ Community services
e.g. help with energy bills |
| ☐ Our cause
e.g. food poverty charity birmingham | ☐ Volunteer opportunities
e.g. volunteer at a food bank | ☐ Events
e.g. community lunch saturday |
| ☐ Our services or programs
e.g. free food parcels for families | ☐ Donation opportunities
e.g. donate to a food bank | ☐ Educational resources
e.g. how to cook on a budget |

SEARCH INTENT

Same topic, different goals

Search intent is the goal behind a search. Google shows pages that match the goal, not just the words.

SOMEONE SEARCHES	WHAT THEY WANT	THE PAGE THAT FITS
"food bank near me"	Somewhere to get food today	Location page with address, hours, who can come
"how food banks help families"	To understand the issue	An article or impact page
"riverside food bank"	To reach your organization	Your homepage
"donate to a food bank"	To give money or food	Your donation page

SEO pro note: check intent by looking at what ranks now. If the top results are maps, local SEO matters more than a longer article.

HOW TO READ THE CHECKLIST

Two lines per check: one plain, one technical

- ☐ A plain statement anyone can check, board members included
Grey line: the SEO pro note your web team or consultant should verify

How to check: each card ends with a quick test anyone can do, most in under five minutes.

Running example: Riverside Food Bank, a fictional food bank in Birmingham that wants to reach families, volunteers and donors.

1

Google setup

Score / 5

Why it matters: Google can't show pages it can't find, and you can't fix what you can't see.

- ☐ Google Search Console is set up and verified
Domain property verified by DNS; two owners
- ☐ Your sitemap is submitted in Search Console
Only canonical, indexable URLs returning 200
- ☐ Google is allowed to show your site
"Discourage search engines" off; no Disallow: / in robots.txt
- ☐ Every page opens with https and a padlock
301 to one https host; no mixed content
- ☐ Analytics counts donations, volunteers and contact forms
GA4 key events; 14-month data retention

How to check: Search *site:yourdomain.org* in Google. Do your main pages appear?

2

Keywords & intent

Score / 5

Why it matters: people use their own words, and pages must match what they're trying to do.

- ☐ We know what we want to be found for
Goals mapped: services, donate, volunteer, location
- ☐ We use our audience's words, not internal jargon
Terms from Search Console, autocomplete, People also ask
- ☐ Each important page focuses on one main topic
One primary topic per URL; no cannibalization
- ☐ Each page matches what searchers want: help, learn or give
Intent checked against current top results
- ☐ We never repeat keywords unnaturally
No keyword stuffing in text, titles or alt text

How to check: Search for your main service. Are the top results guides, maps or service pages?

3

Homepage

Score / 5

Why it matters: it tells visitors and Google who you are, what you do and where.

- ☐ The main heading says what you do, not a slogan
Descriptive H1; brand plus cause in the title tag
- ☐ Your full name and location appear as text
Name, address, phone match your Business Profile
- ☐ Main programs are listed, with links
Crawable links; key pages within 3 clicks
- ☐ One clear main button: Donate, Get help or Volunteer
Primary CTA above the fold, tracked
- ☐ Trust details are visible: registration, partners, ratings
Mirrored on About and in Organization schema

How to check: Show your homepage to someone for five seconds. Can they say what you do and where?

4

Titles & headings

Score / 5

Why it matters: they are your page's shop window in Google, and its table of contents.

- ☐ Every important page has its own clear title
Unique title tags: topic first, brand after
- ☐ Every important page has its own short summary for Google
Unique meta descriptions; Google may rewrite them
- ☐ Titles are short enough not to be cut off
About 50–60 characters; truncation is by pixel width
- ☐ Each page has one main heading saying what it covers
One descriptive H1 per page
- ☐ Sub-headings organize the page logically
H2 and H3 hierarchy; headings not used for styling

How to check: Search *site:yourdomain.org*. Do any results share the same title?

5

Helpful content

Score / 5

Why it matters: Google aims to show pages that genuinely help people.

- ☐ Program pages say who you help, how, when and where
Complete, intent-matched content; no thin pages
- ☐ Pages include your own stories, photos and experience
First-hand experience (E-E-A-T)
- ☐ Figures show where they came from, and the year
Primary sources linked
- ☐ Important pages are reviewed and updated regularly
Genuine updates; honest last-updated dates
- ☐ AI-written drafts are checked by a knowledgeable person
Avoids scaled, low-value content

How to check: Read a program page as a newcomer. Could you get help without phoning?

6

Trust & credibility

Score / 5

Why it matters: people and Google look for signs you are real, accountable and honest.

- ☐ The About page explains who you are, with key facts
Legal name, registration number, founding year
- ☐ Leaders and team members are named, with photos
Team and author pages; Person schema
- ☐ Contact details and address (where safe) are easy to find
Consistent NAP; address hidden for refugees
- ☐ Annual reports and financial information are published
HTML summaries plus PDF downloads
- ☐ Articles show who wrote them, and when
Bylines, author bios, review dates

How to check: Could a stranger confirm you are a registered charity in under a minute?

7

Local SEO

Score / 5

Why it matters: most “near me” searches are answered by the map, not a website.

- ☐ Your Google Business Profile is claimed and complete
Accurate primary category; eligibility checked
- ☐ Name, address and phone are identical everywhere
NAP consistency across citations
- ☐ Opening hours, including holidays, are up to date
Special hours for closures and festivals
- ☐ Each real location has its own page
No near-identical city (doorway) pages
- ☐ You appear correctly on Apple Maps and Bing too
Apple Business Connect, Bing Places, OpenStreetMap

How to check: Search “[your service] near me” on a phone. Do you appear, with the right details?

8

Internal links

Score / 5

Why it matters: links between your pages guide visitors and show Google what matters most.

- ☐ The homepage links to programs, donation and volunteer pages
Key pages within 3 clicks of the homepage
- ☐ Stories and articles link to related programs and giving
Contextual links in the body text
- ☐ Link words say where they go, not “click here”
Descriptive anchor text
- ☐ Every important page is linked from at least one other page
No orphan pages
- ☐ Links go straight to the final page, not via redirects
Update internal links after URL changes

How to check: From your homepage, count the clicks to reach the donation page.

9

Images

Score / 5

Why it matters: well-prepared images load fast, help screen-reader users and can appear in image search.

- ☐ Photos are compressed and no bigger than needed
Most images well under 200 KB; responsive sizes
- ☐ Image files have descriptive names
e.g. volunteers-packing-parcels.webp
- ☐ Meaningful images have a short description (alt text)
Written for accessibility; no keyword stuffing
- ☐ Decorative images are skipped by screen readers
alt="" on decorative images
- ☐ The main image at the top loads first
Hero not lazy-loaded; WebP or AVIF

How to check: Open a photo from your site in a new tab. Is the file name meaningful?

10

Technical basics

Score / 5

Why it matters: Google must be able to reach, read and store your pages, quickly, on phones.

- ☐ Key pages work well on a phone
Mobile-first indexing: same content on mobile
- ☐ Pages pass Google's speed and stability checks
Core Web Vitals: LCP ≤ 2.5 s, INP ≤ 200 ms, CLS ≤ 0.1
- ☐ Old or moved pages forward to the right new page
301 redirects; no chains or blanket homepage redirects
- ☐ There are no broken links on key pages
Regular crawl; fix links at the source
- ☐ Duplicate versions of a page point to one main version
rel=canonical is a hint; keep signals consistent

How to check: In Search Console, open the Pages report. Is any important page "not indexed"?

11

WordPress settings

Score / 5

Why it matters: a few settings decide whether WordPress helps your SEO or blocks it.

- ☐ One SEO plugin is installed and set up, such as Yoast or Rank Math
Never two SEO plugins; check output in page source
- ☐ Page addresses are readable, like /volunteer/
Settings › Permalinks › Post name
- ☐ Low-value pages (thank-you, search results) are hidden from Google
noindex, but keep them crawlable
- ☐ Tags and media pages don't create thin pages
Noindex thin tag archives; attachment pages off
- ☐ Plugins and theme are lightweight and maintained
Remove unused plugins; test Core Web Vitals

How to check: Go to Settings › Reading. Is "Discourage search engines" unticked?

12

Structured data

Score / 5

Why it matters: hidden labels help search engines read your facts; they don't guarantee special results.

- ☐ Your organization's details are labelled for search engines
Organization or NGO schema: logo, contact, sameAs
- ☐ Events are labelled with date, time and place
Event schema, usually via your events plugin
- ☐ Articles are labelled with author and dates
Article schema
- ☐ Page trails (breadcrumbs) are labelled
BreadcrumbList
- ☐ Labels are tested and match what's on the page
Rich Results Test and Schema.org Validator

How to check: Paste your homepage address into Google's Rich Results Test.

13

AI search readinessScore / 5

Why it matters: AI tools now answer questions about charities, often without a click.

- ☐ A “key facts” section says who you are, what you do and where
Plain HTML text, consistent with schema
- ☐ Common questions are answered in the first sentence
Answer-first, self-contained passages
- ☐ Your details match on every profile and directory
Consistent entity data across platforms
- ☐ Facts and figures are dated and sourced
Verifiable facts are easier to cite
- ☐ AI search tools aren’t accidentally blocked
OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot allowed; CDN bot rules checked

How to check: Ask ChatGPT or Gemini “What does [your organization] do?” Is the answer right?

14

Links & authorityScore / 5

Why it matters: links from respected, relevant websites act like recommendations.

- ☐ Partners and funders link to your current website
Partner and grantee pages checked
- ☐ You are listed on your charity register and trusted directories
Regulator, Candid, volunteering platforms
- ☐ Local media or community sites have covered your work
Digital PR: local stories and original data
- ☐ You have never bought links or used link schemes
Google spam policies
- ☐ Sponsor links are marked as sponsored
rel="sponsored" or rel="nofollow"

How to check: List your ten closest partners. How many link to your website?

15

Measuring resultsScore / 5

Why it matters: SEO should bring help, gifts and volunteers, not just visitors.

- ☐ Someone checks Search Console every month
Clicks, impressions, CTR, position by page
- ☐ You can see which searches bring visitors
Brand vs non-brand queries
- ☐ Donations from Google visits are tracked
GA4 key events by source, reconciled
- ☐ Volunteer and contact forms from Google are tracked
Confirmed submissions only
- ☐ Reports focus on outcomes, not just visitor numbers
No vanity metrics

How to check: Can you say how many donations came from Google search last month?

16

AccessibilityScore / 5

Why it matters: a site everyone can use serves your whole community, and clear structure helps search engines too.

- ☐ Text is large enough and easy to read
Body text 16 px or larger
- ☐ Text stands out clearly from its background
Contrast 4.5:1 (WCAG 2.2 AA)
- ☐ Headings follow a logical order
Supports screen-reader navigation
- ☐ Images have useful descriptions
Alt text on meaningful images
- ☐ Videos have correct captions
Corrected, not only automatic, captions

How to check: Use your site with only the Tab and Enter keys. Can you reach every menu and button?

TITLES AND SUMMARIES

Before and after: results people click

The title is the blue headline in Google; the summary (meta description) is the text below it. Say what the page offers, for whom, and where.

PAGE	BEFORE	AFTER
Homepage	Home	Riverside Food Bank: Free Food Help in North Birmingham
Donation page	Donate	Donate to Riverside Food Bank: Help Feed Local Families
Program page	Our Services	Free Emergency Food Parcels in Birmingham
Volunteer summary	Welcome to our volunteer page.	Volunteer on weekday mornings or weekends. No experience needed; full training given.
Event summary	Event details.	Free community lunch, Saturday 14 November, 12–2 pm, Erdington Hall. No booking needed.

SEO pro note: keep titles to roughly 50–60 characters and summaries to about 150–160 as guides, not rules. Google truncates by pixel width and may rewrite both; unique, accurate text reduces rewrites.

WORKSHEET

Your keyword plan

List the searches that matter most, who makes them, what they want, and the page that should answer.

KEYWORD	WHO SEARCHES IT?	SEARCH INTENT	RELEVANT PAGE	PRIORITY
food bank near me	Families needing food	Local: get help now	Get food page	High



Don't stuff keywords: repeating a phrase (“food bank Birmingham” in every sentence) makes pages harder to read and is treated as spam. Write naturally and cover the topic fully.

SCORECARD

Where does your SEO stand?

Tick one level per row using your card scores: 0–1 Not started, 2–3 Needs work, 4 Good, 5 Excellent. A self-check, not a Google score.

CATEGORY	NOT STARTED	NEEDS WORK	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Search engine setup Cards 1, 11	☐	☐	☐	☐
Keyword strategy Card 2	☐	☐	☐	☐
On-page SEO Cards 3, 4	☐	☐	☐	☐
Content Cards 5, 6	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local SEO Card 7	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technical SEO Card 10	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internal linking Card 8	☐	☐	☐	☐
Images Card 9	☐	☐	☐	☐
Accessibility Card 16	☐	☐	☐	☐
Schema Card 12	☐	☐	☐	☐
Analytics Card 15	☐	☐	☐	☐
AI search readiness Card 13	☐	☐	☐	☐
Links & authority Card 14	☐	☐	☐	☐

After the basics: what to do next

- Build groups of helpful articles around each program, linked to each other
- Earn links from partners, funders, universities and local media
- Improve Core Web Vitals on page types that fail
- Add Event, Article and Person structured data where relevant
- Check monthly what AI search tools say about you

Your 30-day SEO starter plan

Do this first: two to three hours a week is enough. Fixes such as unblocking Google can work quickly; content and links take weeks to months.

WEEK 1

Foundation

- ☐ Check Google isn't blocked
- ☐ Set up Search Console; submit sitemap
- ☐ Set up Analytics with key events
- ☐ Confirm https on every page
- ☐ Claim your Business Profile, if local

WEEK 2

Keywords & content

- ☐ Fill in the goals and keyword plan
- ☐ Give each key page one main topic
- ☐ Rewrite key titles and summaries
- ☐ Check H1 and H2 headings
- ☐ Add missing facts: who, where, when

WEEK 3

Technical & local

- ☐ Test key pages on a phone and PageSpeed
- ☐ Review Search Console page errors
- ☐ Fix broken links; add redirects
- ☐ Make name, address, phone identical
- ☐ Compress and describe key images

WEEK 4

Measure & improve

- ☐ Add internal links to key pages
- ☐ Test Organization schema
- ☐ Record baseline clicks and key events
- ☐ Improve 3 low-click titles
- ☐ Complete the scorecard

AVOID THESE

Four common mistakes

1

Blocking Google by accident

A ticked "Discourage search engines" box can hide the whole site. Check it after every launch.

2

Writing about yourselves, not your audience

People search for help and answers. Lead with who you help, how and where.

3

Buying backlinks

It breaks Google's spam policies. Earn links from real partners, media and communities.

4

Publishing AI text unchecked

Errors and generic text lose trust. Have a knowledgeable person edit and add real experience.

PREPARED BY

Areeba Rauf

Mission Web Agency

[Visit missionwebagency.us](https://missionwebagency.us)