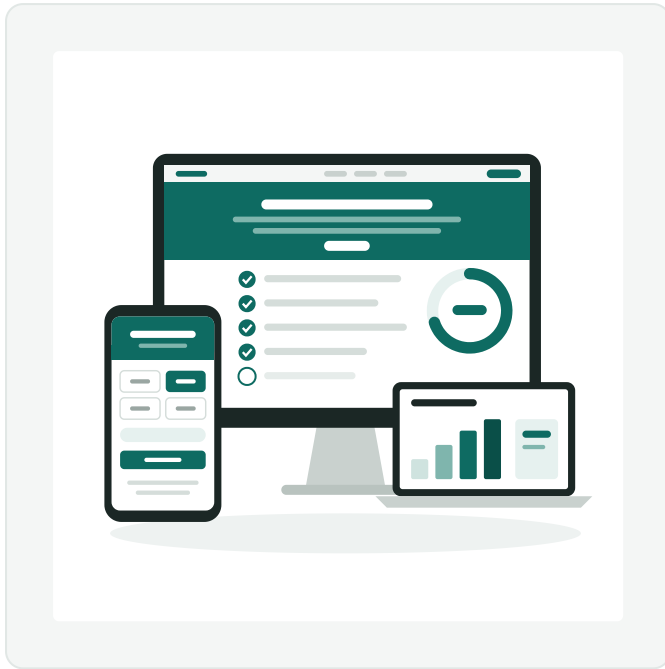




Nonprofit Website Launch Checklist: everything to get right before go-live

A plain-language checklist so your new website raises funds, keeps its Google visibility and stays secure from day one.

Built for: Board members, nonprofit teams and web developers

- ✓ Strategy & content
- ✓ Google & AI search
- ✓ Design & donations
- ✓ Accessibility & security

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1

The challenge

Most nonprofit sites fail because goals were never agreed, not because of code. Donations quietly leak.

2

What it covers

14 areas, from strategy and donations to Google, AI search, accessibility and security.

3

How to use it

Each check has a plain sentence for the board and a technical note for the web team.

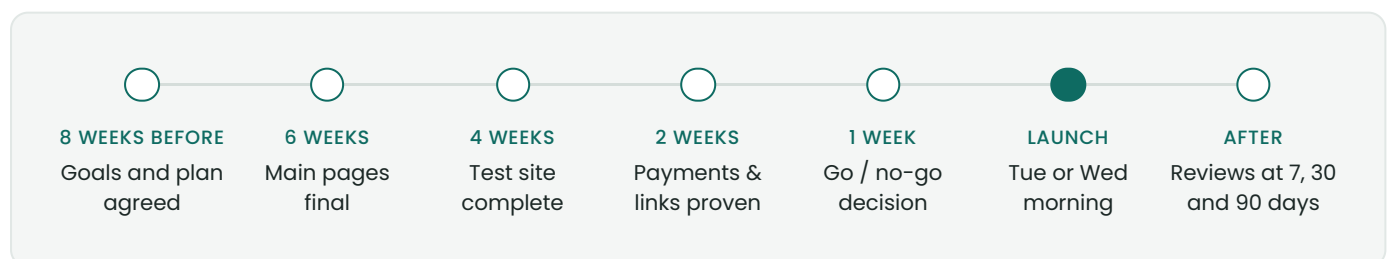
4

The outcome

A site donors trust, Google keeps showing, and a small team can run safely.

LAUNCH TIMELINE

Seven steps from strategy to review



Tick each box when it is true on the live site

☐ Plain check for everyone

Grey line: technical detail for the web team

☐ Ask your team

a question for board meetings

1 Strategy & goals

 Score / 5

Why it matters: a site without agreed goals tries to please everyone and raises less.

- ☐ Our mission is explained in one plain sentence a stranger understands
Mission line approved by the ED; 5-second test
- ☐ The board agreed what the website must achieve, in ranked order
Ranked goals; old-site baselines exported
- ☐ We know who our main donors are and what they need before giving
3–4 personas from CRM data and interviews
- ☐ The path from first visit to donation and volunteering is mapped
Donation and volunteer journeys mapped
- ☐ Menus use plain words and were tested with real users
Card sort, tree test; 5–7 top-level labels

Ask your team: What is the one action we most want visitors to take?

2 Content

 Score / 5

Why it matters: donors check who you are, what you achieve and how you use money.

- ☐ All key pages are written and approved
Core pages frozen 6 weeks before launch
- ☐ Every impact number shows its date and source
Outputs and outcomes separated; methods linked
- ☐ Leaders, finances and charity registration are easy to find
Registration linked to the regulator's record
- ☐ We have permission for every story and photo of a person
Informed consent stored with each asset
- ☐ Photos cannot reveal where vulnerable people are
EXIF and GPS data stripped before upload

Ask your team: Could a new donor check our finances and registration in a minute?

3 Design & giving

 Score / 5

Why it matters: small design choices decide whether a moved visitor actually gives.

- ☐ The site works well on phones, where most visitors are
Mobile-first templates, tested at 360 px
- ☐ A Donate button is visible on every page
Header CTA; all general CTAs use one form
- ☐ Suggested gift amounts reflect what our donors really give
Amounts set around the median online gift
- ☐ Monthly giving is clear, and never chosen for the donor
Explicit frequency choice; no pre-selection
- ☐ Proof of trust sits right next to the donation form
Registration, rating, secure payment, receipt

Ask your team: How many taps does it take to donate on a phone?

4 Website build

 Score / 5

Why it matters: a small team must be able to run it safely for years, not just on launch day.

- ☐ The site runs on current, supported software
WordPress core current, PHP 8.3+, lean theme
- ☐ Only the add-ons we need are installed, and all are maintained
Under 20 plugins; none abandoned or nulled
- ☐ Everyone has their own login, with only the access they need
Named least-privilege accounts; 2–3 admins
- ☐ Moving the site to its live address has been rehearsed
Serialization-safe search-replace; dry run
- ☐ A backup has been restored, and we know how long it takes
Restored to a scratch site; time recorded

Ask your team: If the site broke tonight, who fixes it, and how fast?

5 Donations

Score / 5

Why it matters: it is only proven when real money arrives and the donor gets a receipt.

- ☐ A real gift was made with each payment method, then refunded
Live mode: cards, wallets, PayPal, bank debit
- ☐ Monthly gifts renew, and donors can change or cancel online
Webhooks, retries, card updater, self-service
- ☐ Receipts meet the tax rules in each country we receipt in
e.g. US \$250+ acknowledgment, UK Gift Aid
- ☐ Every gift appears correctly in our donor database
CRM field mapping, dedupe, sync alerts
- ☐ Card details never touch our server; fraud bots are blocked
Tokenized fields, PCI scope, card-testing rules

Ask your team: Has anyone seen a test gift reach the bank and the CRM?

6 Google & SEO

Score / 5

Why it matters: a new site can wipe out years of Google visibility if old links break.

- ☐ Every old page people or Google still use leads to its new page
301 map from crawl, GA4, Search Console, links
- ☐ Search engines are allowed to see the new site on launch day
"Discourage search engines" off; no noindex
- ☐ Google receives a clean list of our pages
XML sitemap, robots.txt, canonicals validated
- ☐ Google can read our official organization details
Organization or NGO schema with registration
- ☐ Pages match what donors, volunteers and people in need search for
Program, donor-intent, long-tail keywords

Ask your team: Which old pages bring the most visitors, and where will they go?

7 Trust & credibility

Score / 5

Why it matters: Google and donors favor sites that show who is behind the work.

- ☐ Photos show our own real work, with captions, not stock images
Original captioned media (E-E-A-T: Experience)
- ☐ Articles show who wrote and reviewed them
Bylines with credentials (Expertise)
- ☐ Partners, press and certifications link to the real source
Verifiable links and badges (Authority)
- ☐ Audited accounts and our registration are one click away
Linked to the regulator's register (Trust)
- ☐ A real address, phone and safeguarding contact are listed
Footer and Organization schema

Ask your team: Would a sceptical journalist find proof our work is real?

8 AI search

Score / 5

Why it matters: ChatGPT, Gemini and Google's AI answers now describe charities to donors.

- ☐ Key pages answer common questions in the first sentence
Answer-first sections; real supporter FAQs
- ☐ A "key facts" box lists our name, registration and focus
HTML text, not images or PDFs
- ☐ Our details match on every charity directory and profile
Candid, regulators, Wikidata, LinkedIn
- ☐ AI search tools are allowed to read our public pages
OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot etc. allowed
- ☐ Someone checks what AI tools say about us every month
Fixed prompt audit; fix the source

Ask your team: What does ChatGPT say when asked if we are legitimate?

9

Accessibility

Score / 5

Why it matters: if older or disabled supporters can't use the site, they can't give.

- ☐ Everything, including donating, works by keyboard and screen reader
Keyboard, NVDA, VoiceOver pass (WCAG 2.2 AA)
- ☐ Text and buttons stand out clearly from the background
Contrast 4.5:1 text; 3:1 UI and focus
- ☐ Forms have clear labels and explain errors in words
Visible labels; errors announced
- ☐ Buttons are big enough to tap easily
Targets at least 24 × 24 px (WCAG 2.5.8)
- ☐ Videos are captioned; no quick-fix "accessibility widgets"
Corrected captions; no overlay plugins

Ask your team: Has someone completed a donation using only a keyboard?

10

Security

Score / 5

Why it matters: a hack or a donor-data leak damages trust faster than anything else.

- ☐ The site is secure (https, padlock) on every address
Valid SSL on all hostnames; HSTS
- ☐ A firewall blocks attacks on logins and the donation form
WAF with rate limits on login and donations
- ☐ Two-step login on the website, hosting, domain and payments
2FA on site, host, registrar, DNS, processor
- ☐ Backups are kept off-site, and a restore has been tested
3-2-1 backups; restore tested and timed
- ☐ Nobody can send fake emails in our name
SPF, DKIM and DMARC on our domain

Ask your team: Who owns our domain, and does its renewal card still work?

11

Speed

Score / 5

Why it matters: every extra second on a phone loses donors before they reach the form.

- ☐ The donation page works within about 3 seconds on a phone
Mid-range Android over 4G
- ☐ Hosting can handle a sudden rush, such as after media coverage
Managed hosting, object cache, spike plan
- ☐ Pages load fast everywhere, but donation forms are never cached
CDN; donation and account pages bypassed
- ☐ Images are compressed, and the main image loads first
WebP or AVIF; hero never lazy-loaded
- ☐ Extra scripts (chat, pixels, widgets) are kept to a minimum
Third-party script audit

Ask your team: How fast is our donation page on an average phone?

12

Tracking & reporting

Score / 5

Why it matters: without tracking, the board can't see which efforts raise money.

- ☐ Visitor statistics are set up, keeping 14 months of history
GA4: 14-month retention, internal filter
- ☐ Google and Bing search tools are connected from day one
Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools
- ☐ Each donation is counted once, with the right source
Deduped by transaction ID; referrals excluded
- ☐ Figures are checked against the payment system each month
Processor, CRM and GA4 reconciled
- ☐ We agreed the few numbers the board sees each month
Revenue per visitor, conversion, recurring share

Ask your team: Which five numbers will the board see every month?

Final check before launch

Launch only when every box is ticked on the live site, or a named owner has approved an exception in writing.

Design	☐ Donate button visible on every page All templates, mobile included	☐ Cookie banner never hides buttons or forms Checked on small screens
Content	☐ No placeholder or test text anywhere Database searched for "lorem" and "sample"	☐ Figures match the audited accounts Latest filed year
Google & SEO	☐ Old addresses open the right new page Each returns 200 or a single 301	☐ Search engines are allowed in No stray noindex in page source
Technical	☐ No broken pages or server errors No internal 404s or 5xx	☐ Scheduled tasks run on time Real server cron, not WP-Cron
Security	☐ Two-step login on every critical account Site, host, registrar, processor	☐ Backup restore tested this week Within 7 days of launch
Speed	☐ Speed targets met on phones Core Web Vitals within targets	☐ Donation pages never cached Excluded from page and CDN cache
Accessibility	☐ A donation completed by keyboard only Full flow, including payment	☐ Keyboard focus never hidden Not covered by sticky bars
Donations	☐ Payments are live, not in test mode Test keys removed	☐ Receipt arrives within a minute Not in spam; SPF, DKIM, DMARC pass
Tracking	☐ Each gift recorded once, with its source Key event with transaction ID	☐ Old-site statistics saved Baseline exported for comparison

Launch-day plan

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 2 days before | Prepare the switch and the fallback plan
Lower DNS TTL to 300 s; confirm rollback |
| 2 hours before | Freeze content; back up old and new sites
Full file and database backups |
| Launch | Put the new site live and check the padlock
Deploy, search-replace, switch DNS, check SSL |
| +15 minutes | Clear stored copies of pages
Purge caches; flush permalinks |
| +30 minutes | Let search engines in
Untick "Discourage search engines" |
| +45 minutes | Make a real gift with each method, then refund
Check receipt, CRM record, analytics event |
| +1 hour | Test the 50 most-used old links; tell Google
Redirect checks; submit sitemaps |
| +1-2 days | Recheck errors, forms and monthly gifts
Logs, webhooks, renewals |



Fallback rule: if donations fail and it isn't fixed within two hours, switch back to the old site. Agree who can make that call before launch day.



Pick the right day: never launch within two weeks of a major appeal, Giving Tuesday or the last three weeks of December.

The first 90 days

Stabilize, then fix, then grow. Report progress to the board at day 7, 30 and 90.

DAYS 1–7

Stabilize

- ✓ Key pages appear in Google
Top 20 URLs indexed
- ✓ Error reports checked daily
404 and 5xx logs
- ✓ Every gift matched across systems
Processor, CRM, GA4
- ✓ Failed payments watched
Webhooks and renewals

DAYS 8–30

Fix & improve

- ✓ Recover any lost Google visibility
Compare old vs new URLs
- ✓ Improve the 10 weakest pages
High exits, low engagement
- ✓ Fix the top 3 reasons people quit the donation form
Form funnel and recordings
- ✓ Fix pages slow for real visitors
Field Core Web Vitals

DAYS 31–90

Grow

- ✓ Publish in-depth pages where we have unique data
Pillar pages and topic clusters
- ✓ Earn links from partners and funders
Grantee and partner pages
- ✓ Pitch one data story to the media
Digital PR
- ✓ Run a first careful test on the donation form
One variable at a time

Speed targets on phones

WHAT IT MEASURES	GOOGLE "GOOD"	OUR TARGET
Main content appears LCP	≤ 2.5 s	≤ 2.0 s
Page responds to taps INP	≤ 200 ms	≤ 150 ms
Page doesn't jump around CLS	≤ 0.1	≤ 0.05
Server starts responding TTFB	≤ 0.8 s	≤ 0.5 s cached
First text appears FCP	≤ 1.8 s	≤ 1.5 s

Google's thresholds at the 75th percentile of real visits. Targets are recommended.

What donors look for before giving

- 1 Is it real?
Registration, address, named leaders
- 2 Is it competent?
Programs, team, partners
- 3 Does it work?
Dated impact, evaluations, stories
- 4 Is money used well?
Audited accounts, ratings
- 5 Is giving safe?
Secure form, receipt promise
- 6 Will I hear back?
Impact updates, newsletter

YOUR RESULTS

Is your website ready to launch?

Your total

Add up your scores from areas 1 to 12.

/ 60

60 / 60

Ready

Complete the final check on page 5, then launch.

Any gap

Launch only with a plan

Each empty box needs an owner, a fix date or a written exception.

Key areas

Never skip these

Gaps in area 5 (donations), 6 (Google) or 10 (security) should delay the launch.

AVOID THESE

Four mistakes that cost the most

1

Launching at a busy time

A fault during a major appeal or late December costs far more than in a quiet month.

2

Payments left in test mode

Donors fill in the form and no money is taken. Always make a real gift, then refund it.

3

All old links sent to the homepage

Google rankings and partner links are lost. Map each old page to its closest new page.

4

Photos that reveal locations

Hidden location data in a photo from a shelter or conflict zone can put people at risk.

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