



A Practical Guide to Turn Clicks Into Gifts

Prepared by Douglas Shaw & Associates



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You work hard to reach donors. Let's make it easy for them to give.

No matter how people first hear about your organization, most will learn more about you online before they donate. They might look at your social channels, search for your organization's name, or type your URL directly. Either way, your online presence is now a key part of their decision to give or not give.

Your website is where potential donors confirm who you are, what you do, and how their gift will make a difference. It's the central hub where they:

Explore your history
and mission

See stories
of impact

Understand the tangible
impact of their generosity

When donors arrive on your website ready—or almost ready—to give, our job as fundraisers is to remove any friction from the giving process. That means combining clear, compelling messaging with technology that works seamlessly. When both come together, more people finish the giving process and your revenue grows!

When a donor's journey brings them to your website, they want to have these questions answered ...

- 1 Does this organization look like it knows what it's doing?
- 2 Are there stories of impact or stats that prove my dollar will make a difference?
- 3 Can I get my questions answered quickly and transparently?



Opportunities to leverage your technology and reduce giving friction.

1 Website

Your website is where donors and potential donors interact with your donation form. Your site should properly house, display, and link to that form so they can make a gift.

One major source of friction is often **website speed**—how long it takes a website to load pages for both desktop computers and mobile devices. There are many ways to measure a website's page speed. For instance, how quickly is content visible on the page, when can the user start interacting with the page content, or how long does it take for the page to fully load? The time it takes for the user to feel like the site is fully loaded is a metric called Largest Contentful Paint. It's recommended that you have this be a value of 2.5 seconds or less. Even a one-second delay can cut conversion rates by up to 55%. That's a loss of gifts just because the page is slow.

Another friction point is **domain consistency** between a nonprofit's main website and its donation form. This is crucial to instilling trust and credibility with donors.

When users navigate from the main website to the donation form, seeing the same domain reassures them that they are still within the nonprofit's secure and official environment. A different domain might raise suspicions about the legitimacy of the donation process, potentially causing them to leave before making a gift.

2 Donation form provider

This is the tool that builds or provides a donation form. At its most basic, a donation form can be coded in HTML or via other similar technologies. However, more modern donation forms require significantly more coding for them to display well, work across multiple devices, and accept payments from a variety of sources.



No matter which donation form provider you use, one thing is non-negotiable: a **strong value proposition**.

Because technology and user expectations change quickly, many organizations now use providers that specialize in donation forms. These partners stay current so your donors enjoy a smoother, more modern giving experience without constant custom development on your end.

No matter which donation form provider you use, one thing is non-negotiable: a **strong value proposition**. The value proposition on your donation form is a compelling and concise statement that communicates the unique benefits and impact donors can achieve by

contributing to your organization. A well-crafted value proposition aims to evoke emotions, aligning donors and potential donors with the organization’s mission and motivating them to be a part of something meaningful.


The value proposition also answers this question: “What difference will my donation make?” By providing specific examples or sharing success stories, nonprofits can help donors understand the real-world change their support can bring to fruition.

3 Payment processor

The payment processor handles the transfer of funds from the donor to your organization. It:

Verifies customer information	Checks for sufficient funds or available credit	Securely transmits payment details	Confirms that your organization receives the money
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One consideration to explore is **payment options**. This is especially important with more donors using mobile devices to access your site. As mobile continues to grow, offering quick and easy ways for individuals to give in just a few short clicks is essential. Options like Apple Pay, Google Wallet, PayPal, and Venmo can streamline the donation process from minutes to seconds, and that can mean more completed gifts. Because donors use different payment methods, organizations that provide multiple payment options ensure they are inclusive and accessible to a wider audience.



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4 Merchant account

A merchant account is another behind-the-scenes tool. It temporarily holds funds during the transfer from the donor’s account to your organization. Often, the payment processor you select also provides the merchant account, so this particular account is transparent to the organization. It works and does its job, but you don’t really need to do anything to make it work.

5 Constituent Relationship Manager (CRM)

Your CRM is the database that stores donor information and transaction details. For PCI compliance, most sensitive payment data stays with the payment processor, while the CRM receives:

Donor contact information	Gift amounts and dates	Unique IDs that connect to the processor if needed
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When the donation form and CRM communicate reliably, you can follow up promptly, steward donors well, and report accurately on giving.

What's next?

Before you determine if your organization needs a change, it's helpful to first document what you're currently using. This can help you identify which pieces may need to be changed and where systems are interconnected so you'll know when a change in one area will require adjustments in others.

- 1 **Website:** _____
- 2 **Donation Form Provider:** _____
- 3 **Payment Processor:** _____
- 4 **Merchant Account:** _____
- 5 **CRM:** _____

If you are experiencing problems with your donation form keeping up with technology, or if your donors are having trouble making donations, it might be a good time to discuss changes to your donation platform and processes.

When evaluating donation platforms, we recommend prioritizing:



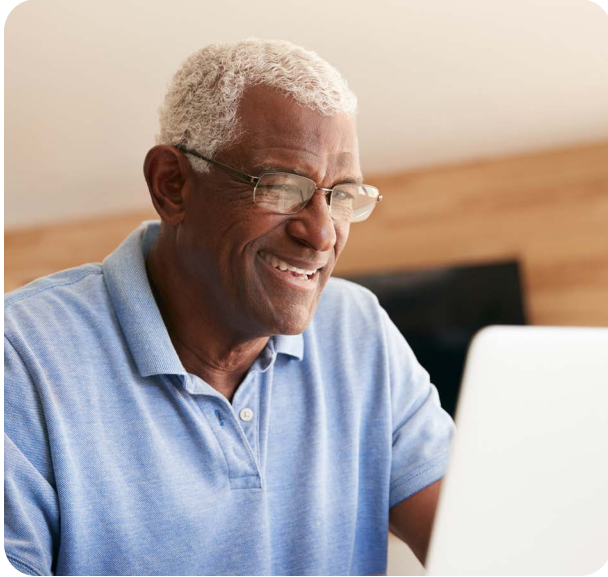
Integration with your CRM to allow for automatic data transfer for the most up-to-date and accurate information with minimal manual work for your team.



Reliability with your donation provider, which should be able to handle and scale during high giving seasons (like GivingTuesday, holidays, the month of December, etc.) Particularly on December 31, you want to be confident it will not slow down or fail, allowing donors to give easily.



Timely updates for key technological advancements. This has become exceedingly important with the rise of mobile transactions. The majority of prospective donors interact with organizations via mobile devices; therefore, allowing them to give through PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, and Google Wallet is critical for increasing conversions. Many tools also offer AI designed specifically to help increase monthly donors and average gift amounts.



When a gift is submitted through the donation form, the gift details and donor information must be passed to the CRM. This is often done via an API or a native integration between the two systems.

Depending on your CRM, the number of options with a native integration will vary.

Custom integrations require a developer, not only for the initial setup but also for ongoing maintenance as technology, APIs, or organizational needs change.

Platform

Other than the priorities above, Douglas Shaw & Associates is happy to work with any chosen technology to keep your website and campaigns running smoothly.

Donation platforms and payment processors vary widely in cost and donor-facing features. Payment processors typically charge a per-transaction fee as a percentage of the donation. Donation platforms may charge an annual fee, a fee based on the transaction amount, and often onboarding costs.

If you choose to offer donors the opportunity to cover transaction fees, we often see that around 90% choose to do so, significantly reducing the tool's net cost to your organization.

The process for migrating to a new donation form platform and payment processor is different for every organization. Onboarding can be completed in a few days in some cases; however, when working integrations into your CRM, it's better to plan on a slower and more thorough onboarding process to ensure everything works as expected. We recommend taking 1-2 months to handle this transition for a tool that has a native integration. If you're working with APIs and custom development, you'll need to connect with your developer directly for a time estimate.

To protect your most important giving season, we strongly recommend completing all technology transitions by early to mid-October so your team is confident and your systems are stable before year-end giving ramps up.

Why does all this matter?

When someone arrives on your donation form, it's easy to assume they've already decided to give. **In reality, people on the donation form are still very much in the decision-making process.**

Any confusion, delay, or doubt can cause them to leave without completing their gift. This includes:

- Slow page loads
- Unfamiliar or confusing domains
- Cluttered forms or unclear value propositions
- Limited payment options

It's impossible to eliminate friction entirely, but we can reduce it. Right now, the average organization sees only about 11%* of visitors complete the donation process. That means nearly nine out of 10 people who start don't finish.



Optimizing donation forms is something we do all the time here at Douglas Shaw & Associates, and the truth is—it's different for every organization. If you're unsure where to start, or if your current form isn't performing the way you'd like, we'd love to come alongside you, evaluate your technology, and help more of your visitors become committed donors.



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*M+R Benchmarks Report