Website Optimization

ACTION PLAN

A NOTE FROM NEON ONE

It's more important than ever for nonprofits to have a beautiful, functional website. It's where people will go to learn about your organization, find information about your work, read about your programming, and get excited about supporting your cause.

But building a great website can feel overwhelming, especially if you don't have a dedicated graphic designer or web developer. That's why we wrote this seven-week Website Optimization Action Plan. Each week in this resource explains a different part of designing an effective website, and the accompanying activities will help guide you through the unique stages of actually creating or updating your own site.

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Week 1

Intro to Website Optimization

Everything you do online—whether it's sending an email newsletter or raising money on social media—will point your audiences back to your website. It's where people can learn about your work, connect with the community you serve, vet your organization, and make a donation.

Because it plays such a critical role, it's important that your website is easy to find and navigate. That's where website optimization comes in.

Here's what we'll cover:

- » Why Is Website Optimization So Important?
- » What Does a Well-Optimized Website Do?
- » What You'll Need to Optimize Your Website
- » Recap
- » Activity

Why Is Website Optimization So Important?

Have you ever heard someone joke that their attention span is shorter than a goldfish? That quip is untrue–but not for the reason you'd think. Human attention spans are actually *shorter* than those of goldfish. The average attention span for a goldfish is nine seconds, while the average for humans is 8.25 seconds.

That means, when someone lands on your website, you have less than nine seconds to grab their attention and inspire them to keep browsing. A website that is easy to navigate and provides informative, engaging content will help capture and keep visitors' attention.

This is more important than ever since more and more people choose to support their favorite charities online. According to the Blackbaud Institute, 12% of all fundraising occurs online–and that percentage will grow. Your donors are looking to give to your organization online, but they will only do so if they can easily find and use your site.

What Does a Well-Optimized Website Do?

An optimized website makes it easy for clients, donors, and potential supporters to find information about your programs, learn why they might want to support you, and take action to get involved with your work. Your website should be easy and even pleasurable to use, present important information in a compelling way, and give interested users a straightforward way to support your cause.

Every nonprofit will have slightly different goals for their website, but the most valuable outcomes can be divided into three different categories.

Educate and Engage

Every site is meant to engage the people that visit it. For ecommerce, the goal is to market and then sell a product or service; for nonprofits, the goal is to educate visitors about a problem and then invite them to be part of the solution.

Whether you're a museum sharing information about the importance of arts education, a food bank raising awareness about food insecurity in your community, or a conservation organization teaching visitors about the beauty of your local ecosystems, your website will contain some level of educational content.

THE GOAL IS TO EDUCATE VISITORS ABOUT A PROBLEM AND THEN INVITE THEM TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

You'll also want to engage your audience by asking them to take action on your site. That includes making a donation, signing up for a class or program, joining as a member or volunteer, or even just sharing your mission with their friends and family. If you have a well-optimized website, your visitors will be able to absorb your educational content, get inspired, and get involved.

Establish Trust and Credibility

Have you ever landed on a website that set off alarm bells in your head? Misspelled headlines, intrusive pop-ups, or images not loading all point to a lack of attention to detail from the owner of the site. Sometimes mistakes happen! But, in this day and age, anything less than a professional-looking website has a user thinking, "I don't trust this organization." And, if your visitors don't trust your website, you can be sure they won't be entering their personal details or payment information.

A website's branding, design, and content all contribute to visitors seeing it as safe and trustworthy. Even if the visitor is unaware of the impact those elements have, they'll feel more comfortable browsing your content because they aren't worrying about spam messaging, malware, or viruses.

Just as a poorly managed website can deter supporters, an impactful, well-designed website can establish credibility for your organization. Most donors research a nonprofit before deciding to give, and they will almost always look at your website as part of their research. When you share compelling content, impact stories, and transparency about financial information,

you signal to your visitors that you're a trustworthy organization that they can trust to use their support wisely.

Drive Donations and Support

Your site will educate your visitors about the work you do to serve your community. You'll show them the problem you're trying to solve, the gap you're looking to fill, or the dream you're working to make possible, and you'll invite them to be part of that movement. It's important to give them a clear path to do so.

If you're like most nonprofits, your website will ask visitors to make a donation. Maybe you'll ask them to become a member. Maybe you'll give them the opportunity to volunteer for you or to raise money on your behalf. But, whatever you ask them to do, your website should be designed in a way that makes it easy for them to act.

It should be convenient for people to find your donation form and make a gift. Buying a membership or enrolling in your programs should be simple. Signing up to volunteer should only take a few seconds. That means your forms—whether donation forms or something else—should be short, straightforward, and easy to use.

What You'll Need to Optimize Your Website

Whether you're building a website from scratch or updating an existing one, this action plan will help you get started. Here's what you'll need!

Website Management Tool

This is the platform you'll use to build your website, insert copy, add images, and more. Our favorite tool is Neon Websites, but we're admittedly a little biased. WordPress, Wix, and Squarespace are all popular systems, too.

Domain Name

Your domain name is your website's address—it's what people will type into their internet browser to land on your website. Buying a domain name is an important part of establishing trust and credibility; when you have a generic URL, it can make your organization harder to find online and can make you look amateurish. A generic address like "organizationname. squarespace.com" feels less professional than "organizationname.com."

Fundraising Platform

Your fundraising platform should give you the ability to either create standalone donation pages, embed forms in a web page as a widget, or both. It should give you the ability to build and customize your forms, then either embed them on different pages or connect them to your "Donate" button. If you're a membership-driven organization, it will help you build membership forms that relay the benefits of membership and make it easy to sign up.

This should also include your payment processor. A payment processor is the service that handles transactions for donations or other payments.
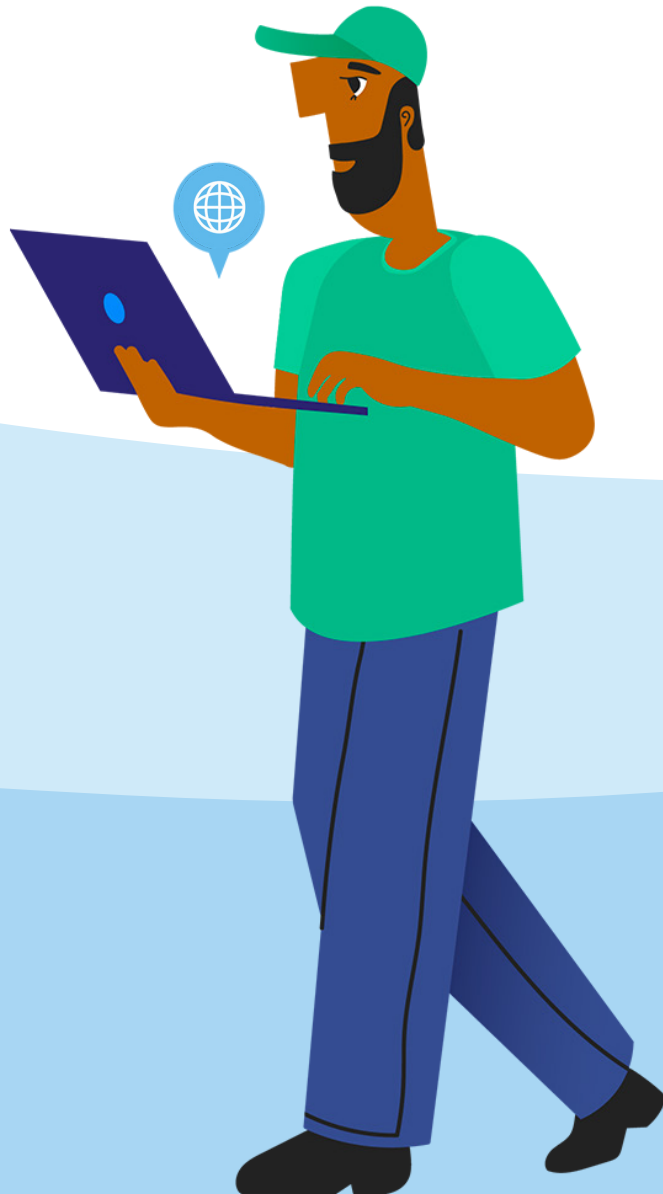
Neon One Quick Tip

Did you know you can use Neon CRM to create different forms for your website? The simple interface makes it easy to create streamlined forms for donations, volunteer signup, membership enrollment, and even storefront transactions that you can then add to your website.

A Plan for Your Site

Take some time to map out the most important types of content you'll need to have on your website. Add everything you can think of, from your mission statement to pages for each of your programs to educational content to forms. Don't worry if you don't already have all the content you need—that's what this guide is for!

Take some time to think about the people you anticipate visiting your site. What do they want to know? What information do they want to see? How do you want them to act on that information? Make sure you think about different groups of people, too. Potential clients may need to find information about how they can access your services. Interested donors may want to see educational content before they decide to give. Community partners may need to find your contact information or your logos. Having a vision for your site will make it easier to work through this action plan.

Optimizing a website can feel like a big job. And it is—but it's worth the work! Here's why.

1. Well-optimized websites will grab visitors' attention and keep them engaged.

2. A good website will help establish your organization as a credible, trustworthy nonprofit, and it will help you educate your visitors and make them more likely to donate.

3. To create a website or optimize an existing one, you'll need: A content management system (CMS), a domain name, a fundraising platform, and a plan for your site.

Coming Up Next …

This week, you learned about the value of an optimized website, what it should include, and the different tools and information you'll need to have handy as you build or revamp your website. In next week's module, we'll look at:

- Why your organization's branding may be more important than you'd think
- What your branding should include
- How to write a mission and vision statement
- The difference between visual and written branding

Sit down with someone who doesn't work with your organization; a friend, a loyal donor, a board member, or a volunteer. Ask them to browse your website, then answer these questions. Take some notes! You'll use their answers to inform your website optimization.

☐ How did this website's design and content make them feel? Was using it an enjoyable experience? What did they like?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Did they encounter anything on the website that was confusing or off-putting? What would they change, add, or adjust?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Were they able to find important information quickly? Did they get stuck anywhere?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Did the pages load quickly enough?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Did they find any broken links?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Does the website make them want to get involved with your nonprofit by donating, volunteering, or becoming a member? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Did they know where to go to donate, volunteer, or become a member?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ How many clicks did it take for them to get to your donation page?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Would they feel comfortable sending a link to this website to their family, friends, or colleagues? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ Do they have any other comments or suggestions you can use to improve your website?

_____
_____
_____
_____

If you're just getting started and don't yet have a website, find the websites for one or two nonprofits with similar missions. Ask your friend:

☐ How does this website make them feel? What design elements make them feel that way?

_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ What do they like about this website's design and content?

_____

_____

_____

_____

☐ What don't they like about the design and content? How would they change or improve
   those elements?

_____

_____

_____

_____

☐ What information is helpful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

☐ What information is missing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

☐ Would they donate, volunteer, or buy a membership from this organization? Why or why
   not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

☐ What parts of this website would they apply to your new website?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pay attention to the way they navigate the website, what information they try to find, and any
comments they make along the way. Their insight will be very helpful to you as you work on
putting together your own site!

Nonprofit Branding

Think about a couple of your favorite companies. What comes to mind? Do you think about their color schemes? Their logo? Maybe a tagline?

All of those things—the elements that help you recognize a store or company—are part of that organization's brand. Branding is a big deal for for-profit companies, and it's important for nonprofits, too.

In this module, we'll explore what branding is, how it impacts your nonprofit, and how to create and use branding for your organization. You'll also read some expert advice from Haley Boeschen, Neon One's Brand and Corporate Web Developer, and Farra Trompeter, Co-Director and Member-Owner at Big Duck.

Let's get started!

» Why Is Branding So Important?

» What's In a Brand?

» Where to Apply Your Brand to Your Website

» Create a Branding Document and Press Kit

» Recap

» Activity

Why Is Branding So Important?
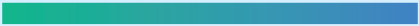
As a nonprofit, your brand helps your audiences connect with you by creating a consistent presence online and off. When someone lands on your website, sees a post on social media, receives a direct mail piece, or picks up a brochure, they'll understand that each asset comes from a single organization—yours.

Your brand is what people think of when they think about your organization. Whether it's your visual brand, values, or even tone of voice, your brand helps succinctly communicate who you are and what you stand for.

A great brand also establishes trust and credibility. Have you ever landed on a website that looked amateur or outdated? Maybe there were too many different fonts on the page, or maybe the page looked crowded with lots of content and too many pictures. That company's brand didn't do much to make its website look good. Alternatively, websites that are nicely designed with a polished, modern-looking logo, clean fonts, and a contemporary color scheme probably seem much more trustworthy.

A NONPROFIT'S BRANDING SHOULD REPRESENT WHAT THEY STAND FOR AND WHO THEY ARE SUPPORTING. A BRAND HEAVILY INFLUENCES CONSUMERS' CHOICES, INCLUDING DONORS AND OTHER SUPPORTERS.

Haley Boeschen
Brand and Corporate Web Developer, Neon One

What's In a Brand?

Your brand is everything that makes your organization unique. Anything that defines you, whether it's imagery or even words and phrases you use frequently, is part of your brand.

That said, here are some elements that work together to make up a cohesive brand identity:

Your name and logo:

These are probably some of the first elements you think of when you hear the word "brand"—they're important!

Your color palette and fonts:

Along with your logo, these are the most important pieces of your visual brand. If you think of Target, Starbucks, Facebook, or other major brands, you can almost certainly think of their brand colors. These elements will help your constituents associate your marketing materials, communications, and other assets with your organization.

Your mission statement:

What does your organization do? Why do you exist? What problems are you working to solve? Your mission statement should be a short summary of who you are, what you do, and why you do it. Just as your logo helps establish your visual identity, this asset will help establish who your organization is and the outcomes you make possible.

Your vision statement:

Your mission statement summarizes what problems you solve and how you solve them. Your vision statement summarizes your end game. Think of it as a description of the world you'll leave behind if and when you solve all the problems you address with your work.

Boilerplate copy:

This is a succinct description of your organization and mission. Boilerplate is useful to include at the end of press releases, but it's also useful for intros at community events, elevator pitches, and more.

Your values and your story:

You may not publish your organization's values on your site, but those guiding principles will influence your work, your relationships with constituents, and the way you interact with your community. It's essential for your team to understand your values and what you stand for so that you are consistent in your messaging and communications to your supporters.

Your voice and tone:

While this brand element will almost certainly be kept internal, understanding the voice and tone you'll use in your communications is an important part of establishing your brand. This can be more abstract, like "We speak to our constituents in a friendly but professional tone," or something more concrete, like a full-length style guide with notes about grammar, language, and word choice.

The experiences you give your supporters:

Visual assets like your logo and color scheme help your audiences connect with your organization by establishing a consistent look and feel. The experiences you give your supporters help your audiences connect with you emotionally and intellectually. When you go above and beyond to thank volunteers, make an impression on donors by sending handwritten thank-you cards, or build a

This week's activity will guide you through creating a brand document which you can publish on your site or keep as an internal reference document. Regardless of whether or not you publish your brand and style guide, you'll want to use the guidelines to maintain consistency while creating your website.

WHEN IS IT TIME FOR A NONPROFIT TO REBRAND?

"I recommend that nonprofits conduct an annual brand check-up and determine if they need to shift their brand strategy (what we define as positioning and personality) and then apply that to their brand identity and assets (visuals and messaging). When people hear the word 'rebrand,' they often think it requires a complete makeover. For example, some organizations may only need a new tagline or to refine their visual system to add a secondary color palette; others will need a new name, messaging, and visual system.

Many nonprofits rebrand in connection to a new strategic plan, the vision of a new leader, or before they launch a major campaign. It's also important to consider the experience of your brand across communications channels, including your website, social media, email, mail, events, video, etc. Branding should be an ongoing practice you use to connect with people to achieve your mission and be part of movements for change. If you are asking this question, hone in on why and consider how the brand is working across multiple levels."

Farra Trompeter
Co-Director and Member-Owner, Big Duck

Where to Apply Your Brand to Your Website

Having a well-defined brand is an important first step toward building an effective nonprofit website. Let's take a look at just a few of the many ways you can use different brand assets on your website.

Make Sure Your Logo Is On Your Website

It might sound obvious, but we want to include it just in case: Make sure your logo is on your website. You'll want to include it on your homepage, and it's a good idea to include it on sub-pages, too. Your logo doesn't always have to be front and center— just make sure it's included in a visible but subtle location on different pages. This is an important way to create a consistent experience for your site visitors while they're on your pages, but it's helpful even after they click away from your website. Repeated logo usage will help develop your brand recognition; when a supporter sees your logo (or even just your typography and colors) on different channels, they will be reminded of your organization. With so many ways to donate these days, it's critical to keep your nonprofit top of mind to increase the likelihood that supporters come back to make another gift.
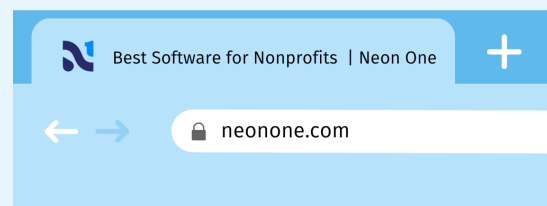
Another key place to use your logo is as your page's favicon. A favicon is the icon displayed in the browser tab when someone is on your website. If you've ever browsed the Internet with multiple tabs open, you know how valuable it is to be able to quickly identify at a glance which tabs contain which websites.

Apply Your Brand Colors to Your Website

Use your brand colors for your website's color scheme. When it's combined with good logo placement, this helps create consistency for your site's users. We'll talk more about the importance of consistency in the next section, which is all about design!
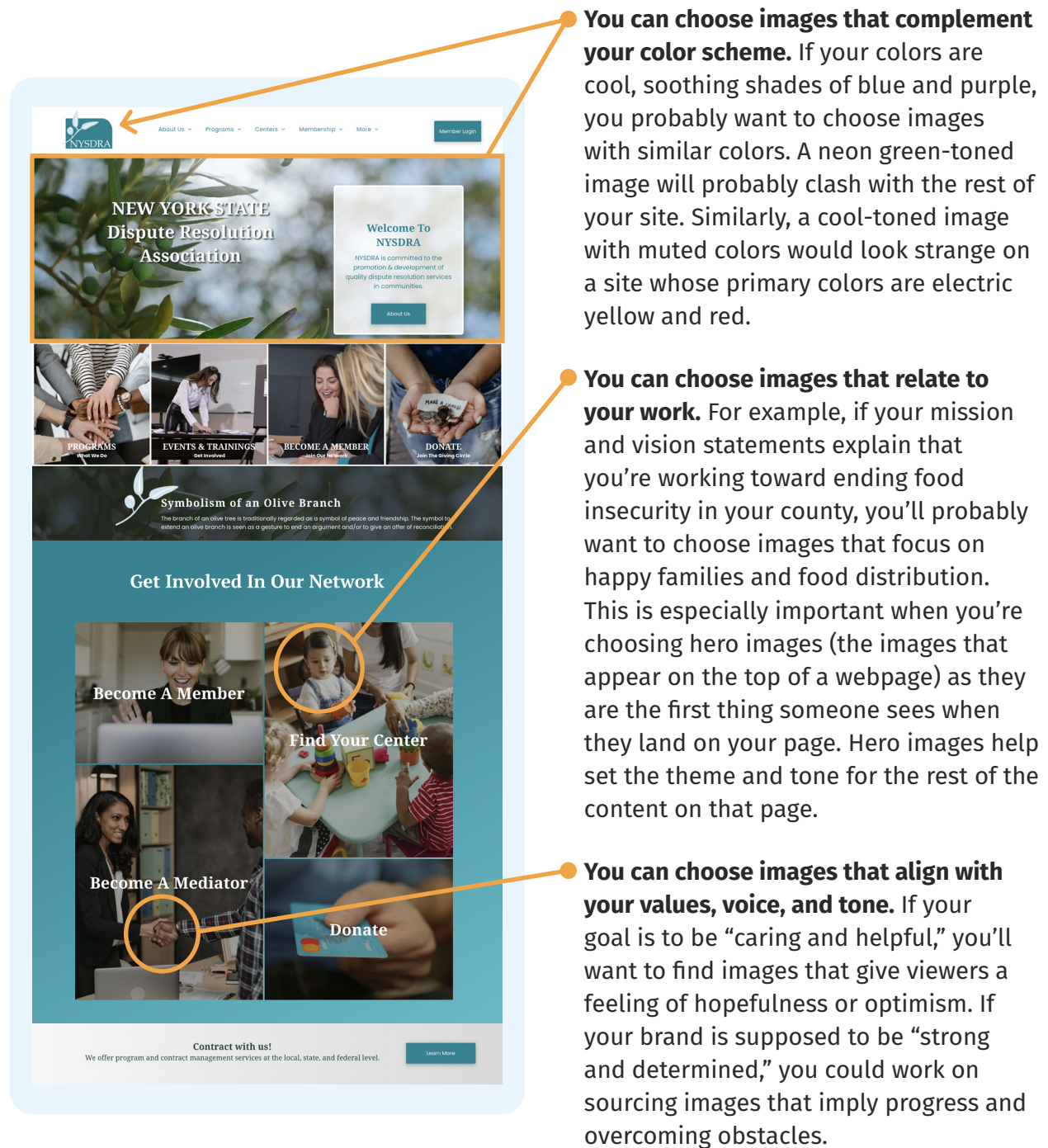
Creating a consistent visual identity across all of your different pages will make your visitors feel comfortable on your website. They'll begin to associate those colors with your organization and, when they see your other branded materials like direct mail appeals, brochures, social media posts, and other communications, they'll quickly associate that content with your nonprofit.

Best Software for Nonprofits | Neon One

neonone.com

Neon One's logo is set as our site's favicon, so it's easy to tell which open tabs contain different pages of our website.

Choose Images That Relate to Your Work and Your Brand

Clear brand guidelines will help you choose images to use in all of your marketing, campaigns, events, and communications. Here are three ways this can be helpful to you:

You can choose images that complement your color scheme. If your colors are cool, soothing shades of blue and purple, you probably want to choose images with similar colors. A neon green-toned image will probably clash with the rest of your site. Similarly, a cool-toned image with muted colors would look strange on a site whose primary colors are electric yellow and red.

You can choose images that relate to your work. For example, if your mission and vision statements explain that you're working toward ending food insecurity in your county, you'll probably want to choose images that focus on happy families and food distribution. This is especially important when you're choosing hero images (the images that appear on the top of a webpage) as they are the first thing someone sees when they land on your page. Hero images help set the theme and tone for the rest of the content on that page.

You can choose images that align with your values, voice, and tone. If your goal is to be "caring and helpful," you'll want to find images that give viewers a feeling of hopefulness or optimism. If your brand is supposed to be "strong and determined," you could work on sourcing images that imply progress and overcoming obstacles.

Add Brand Elements to Your About Us Page

When people visit your About Us page, what kind of information do you think they're looking for? They're almost certainly seeking information that will help them determine your background, what work you do in your community, and whether or not your values are in line with their own.

This page is the perfect place to house some of your branding elements. Your name and logo, mission and vision statements, and some content about your history and guiding values will all help visitors determine whether they'd be interested in supporting you.

WHAT ARE SOME GUIDELINES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN CHOOSING HERO IMAGES FOR WEBSITES?

"Resolution! Just don't go too big. An image should be around 1920px wide for a clear hero. Having your own images could potentially set you apart from your competitor websites. If you have the budget to hire a photographer, do it! They understand composition, imagery concept, and have the equipment so you don't need to spend hundreds on a camera set up. If you are lacking the budget, smartphones are not terrible for capturing images. Keep your images people-centered and relatable!"

Haley Boeschen
Brand and Corporate Web Developer, Neon One

Create a Branding Document and Press Kit

The goal of establishing a brand is to create a consistent experience for your clients, donors, members, volunteers, and other supporters. But, to create a consistent experience, everyone at your organization should know what your brand is, what your guidelines are, and where they can go if they have questions about anything from the colors you use to your vision statement.

Some elements you might want to include in your branding document include:

- **Your logo**: If you can, try including different colors of the logo (full color, white, black, etc.) and different file formats (.jpgs, .pngs, etc.). You may also want to include guidelines around how to use and place your logo.

- **Your brand colors**: It's a great idea to include hexadecimal codes for the colors you use. This will help ensure that the color shades your marketing team uses on your website match the color shades your volunteer includes in their social media graphic.

- **Your brand fonts** and when to use them.

If you choose to make your branding document publicly available, stick to including at least these elements. Branding documents for internal reference can also include guidelines around your organization's tone and voice, image selection, and other elements.

You may also want to consider creating a press kit, especially if you're prioritizing relationships with local news outlets or even other nonprofits in your area. In your press kit, try to include details like:

- A brief "About Us" explainer: Try to keep this to a few sentences about your history and your work.
- Your mission and vision statements.
- Boilerplate copy, especially if you're working on anything that may warrant a press release or news feature.
- Logo files and guidelines.
- Contact information for the person responsible for handling media enquiries.

This week's activity includes checklists you can use as you start to put together your branding document and press kit. Haley even made you a style guide template you can use to organize your different brand assets—it's included in the activity!

Neon One's Style Guide we share with our partners, our employees, and media publications

This week, you learned the basics of nonprofit branding. Here are some takeaways:

1. Your brand isn't just your logo and tagline. It also includes design elements, your values, mission and vision statements, tone of voice, and so much more. Anything that makes people think of you is part of your brand.

2. Having your branding in place will make it easier for you to create a great website experience for your visitors.

3. Taking the time to create a centralized branding document will help you, other staff members, and third parties represent your organization in the best way possible.

4. Whether or not you choose to make your branding document public, it's a good idea to put together a press kit that's available on your site. Simply including some logos, boilerplate copy, and other key branding elements will make your press kit a useful tool for anyone who wants to spread the word about your organization.

Coming Up Next …

This week, you learned the basics of why a consistent brand is important, what your brand should include, and where you might want to apply that branding to your website. We'll expand on this next week, which is all about website design! You'll learn:

- How to incorporate your branding into your website's overall design
- How to structure your navigation
- Tips for choosing great images
- How to optimize your pages for load times

Put together a simple branding document and a brief media kit. The goal will be to create something you and your staff can use as a reference as you work on your website. They'll also be handy when you engage with different community partners, place print ads, design marketing materials, and even work with the media.

Use this handy checklist to guide you, then use the included style guide template to get all of your brand elements together in one easy-to-use document. There are also blank spaces you can use to track any assets that aren't already included in the list!

Design Assets to Include:
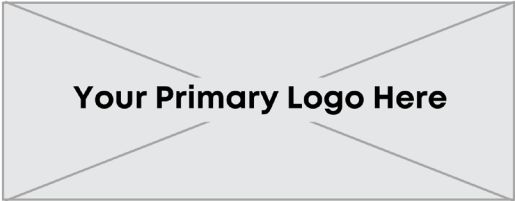
- ☐ Your organization's logo in different formats
  - ☐ .png
  - ☐ .jpg
  - ☐ .ai, .eps, or .svg
  - ☐ .pdf

- ☐ Your organization's logo in different colors
  - ☐ Full color
  - ☐ All black
  - ☐ All white

- ☐ Your brand's hexadecimal color codes (this is a type of 6-symbol code that will help people consistently use the right colors. Neon One's Noble Navy color, for example, is #008BF4)

- ☐ The different fonts you use at your organization and when to use them

- ☐ Guidelines around how to use any of these resources (example: how much space should your logo have around it any time it's used?)

- ☐ _____
  _____

- ☐ _____
  _____

- ☐ _____
  _____

What to Include in Your Press Kit:

☐ A short "About Us" statement

☐ Boilerplate copy (this should be a short paragraph about who you are and who you serve; you'll use it for everything from press releases to elevator pitches to media placements)

☐ Your mission and vision statements

☐ Contact information for anyone the media or community partners will contact if they have questions about how to work with you:

☐ _____
_____

☐ _____
_____

☐ _____
_____

Your Primary Logo Here

ALTERNATIVE LOGOS

Versions of our main logo to support various uses

STACKED OR ALTERNATIVE LOGO

Logo for Darker Backgrounds

COLOR PALETTE

Colors that strengthen our visual identity and brand personality

#222222

#e5e6e7

#a6a6a6

#5f6365

#f5f7f8

FONT IN USE

Distinct typeface that speak for our brand

Aa

[Your Chosen Font Face for Headings]

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijk
lmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890!@#$%^&*()

FONT GUIDE

Recommended font and size pairings

Large heading - [Font Family]
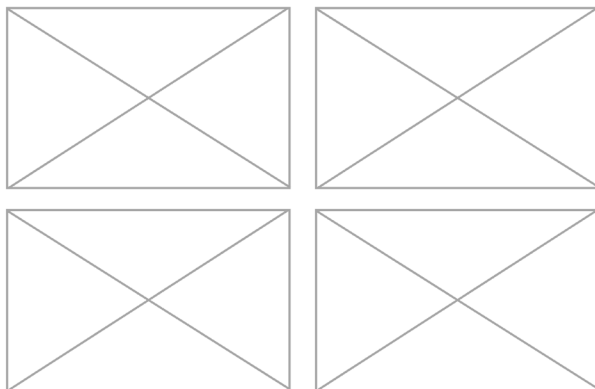
Sub-heading - [Font Family]

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Ut hendrerit ipsum quam, quis convallis tellus gravida ut. Donec commodo interdum magna, eu consectetur risus faucibus eget.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Background and illustration used on the website and in marketing materials

Image types and patterns that compliment our brand.

NEON ONE

ALTERNATIVE LOGOS

Versions of our main logo to support various uses

NEON ONE

NEON ONE

COLOR PALETTE

Colors that strengthen our visual identity and brand personality

#5FB9EB

#008BF4

#EEA447

#DE5750

#282968

FONT IN USE
Distinct typeface that speak for our brand

Aa
Avenir Heavy

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijk
lmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890!@#$%^&*()

FONT GUIDE
Recommended font and size pairings
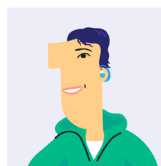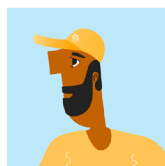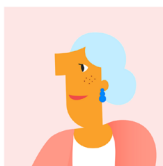
Large heading
Sub-heading - Fira Sans

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Ut hendrerit ipsum quam, quis convallis tellus gravida ut. Donec commodo interdum magna, eu consectetur risus faucibus eget.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Background and illustration used on the website and in marketing materials

The 'One Bunch' an illustration series derived from the Neon One logo.

Website Design

Last week, you started putting together a branding document that contains everything from logo files to color schemes to fonts. This week, you'll explore how to build a beautiful website that's easy to use. Let's get started!

» Why Is Web Design Important?

» Evaluate Your Website

» A Great Website Starts With a Great Homepage

» Think Through Your Site Navigation

» Pay Attention to Load Times

» Make It Mobile

» Recap

» Activity

Why Is Web Design Important?

According to Invicta, 75% of internet users will make a snap judgment about an organization's credibility based on their website design. Donors of all ages and backgrounds—whether they're digital natives like Gen Z or Baby Boomers who saw the internet in its infancy—will be more willing to visit your site, interact with your content, and donate to your cause if that site is well-designed and easy to use.

Evaluate Your Website

Take a few moments to evaluate your current website. Do you see any of these warning signs?

- It's time-consuming for you to edit content, replace images, or update links.

- Your website is difficult to use on mobile devices (hyperlinks and buttons are too small to tap, users have to pinch to zoom or scroll side to side, navigation menus load poorly, etc.).

- Design elements on your pages look outdated or won't load.

- Site analytics reveal high bounce rates or low time spent on page.

- Your site's current color scheme, logos, fonts, and other branding elements don't match the branding elements you're currently using.

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it's probably time to update your site.

HOW DO YOU APPLY YOUR BRAND TO WEBSITE DESIGN?

First, review the content on your homepage and main landing pages. Keep this short! People have low attention spans these days.

Once you've planned what you want to communicate, begin adding in small visual elements that elevate the content, like images, logos, and your other brand assets. Apply the themes and imagery from your brand document that represent your organization."

Haley Boeschen
Brand and Corporate Web Developer, Neon One
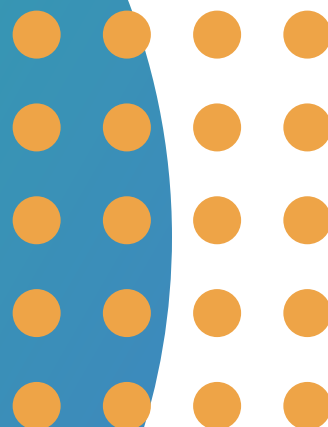
A Great Website Starts With a Great Homepage

When someone lands on your homepage, they should be able to quickly and easily determine who you are and what you do. Make your cause clear on your homepage to help your site visitors determine whether or not they're interested in learning more about your cause.

There are a few ways you can do this using assets you gathered during last week's module on branding.

1. Use a hero image that helps users understand your mission and your work.

2. Add a powerful heading and subheading that summarizes what you do.

3. Use your organization's logo and color scheme to help visitors grasp your brand identity.

4. Include copy that ties into your mission, vision, and values.

   Use the brand elements you gathered last week to build a page that is unique to your organization. You can always ask for opinions and feedback from your friends and family members: If they can't look at your homepage and tell you what you do within a few seconds, keep working on refining your messaging.
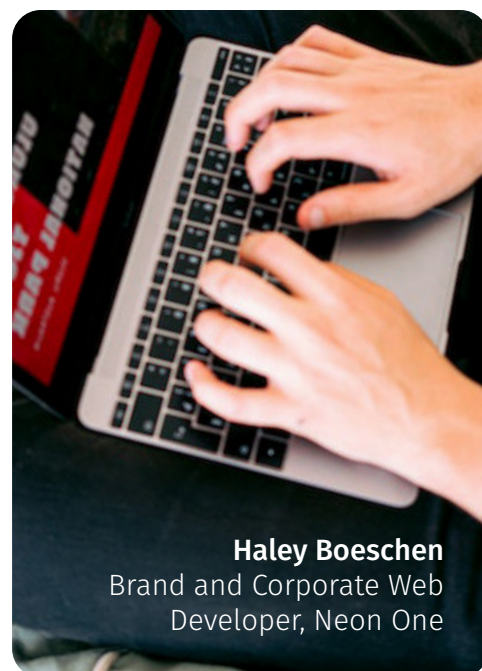
What are some of your favorite resources people can use as they work toward designing their website?

"I mentioned it before, but I love Pinterest for moodboarding! I have a lengthy board dedicated to website design and pull inspiration from it with every new project.

Canva is really great for creating quick marketing graphics. I also am a sucker for pen and paper as a starting point when you're planning the graphics you want to create. You don't need to be an incredible artist—think of it as thought shorthand.

If you aren't comfortable making graphics or designing your site and you have the budget, check out Fiverr! It's a great place to hire talented, freelance creatives. Another option is to do some volunteer recruiting at local colleges and universities to find students who might be interested in helping out."

Haley Boeschen
Brand and Corporate Web
Developer, Neon One

Think Through Your Site Navigation

People usually don't spend lots of time clicking around sites seeking specific information; if they can't find what they want, they'll leave. That might sound scary, but it's actually very helpful when you're creating a website! Think of the main reasons a person will visit your site and put yourself in the shoes of those impatient users. What do they want? What are they looking for? Keep their needs and wants in mind; it will help you create a simple navigation that is easy to use and directs people to the most important pages in just a few clicks. Here's a simple framework to help you set up your site's navigation.
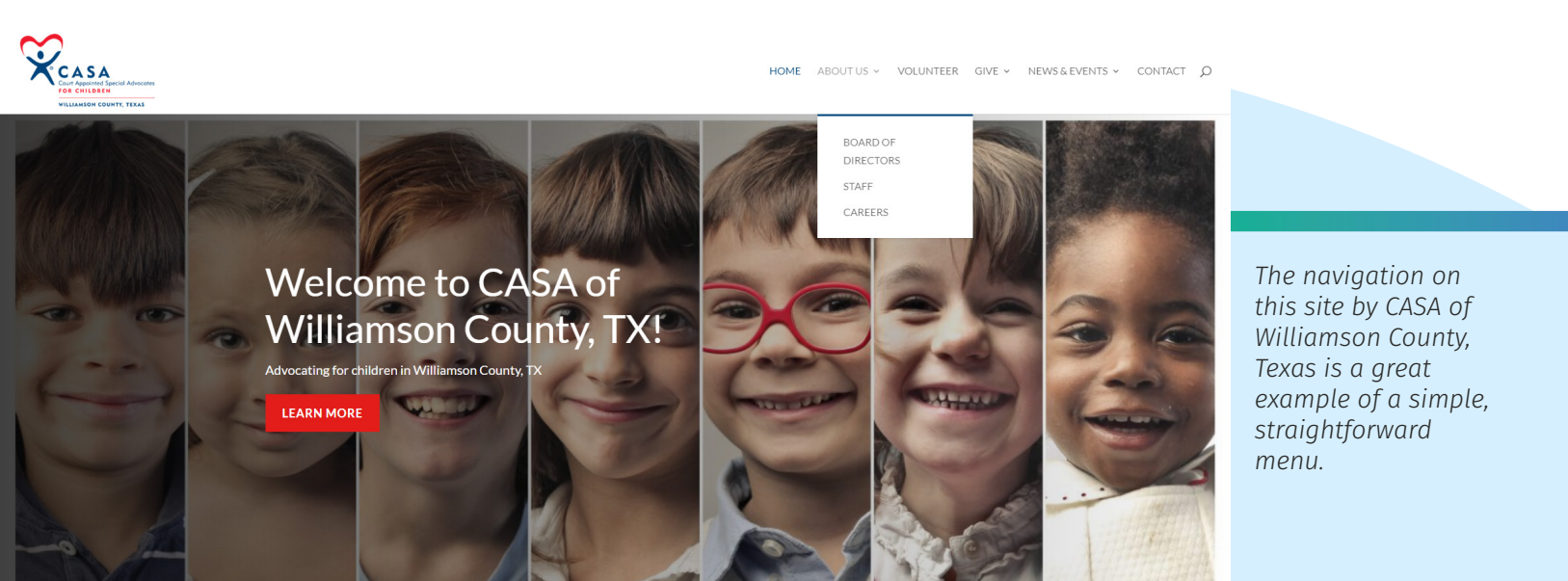
Step One: Map It Out

Sometimes the most effective way to plan your site navigation is also the simplest! Before you start organizing everything, make a map of your site. Identify your major pages, separate them into categories, and decide how you'll arrange those categories in your navigation.

There are lots of ways to do this! Simply sketching it out with a pencil and paper is a tried-and-true method. If you're collaborating with other staff, try using sticky notes or shared documents on Google Drive, One Drive, or another easily accessible program. Once you've mapped out your site and navigation, executing your plan will be much easier.

Step Two: Keep It Simple

It's tempting to want to include every single page on your site in your navigation. Resist that urge! Including a ton of different pages will make your navigation menu crowded and overwhelming. Instead, focus on the most important pages. From there, you may find the opportunity to round up sub-pages that will be helpful for your site visitors.

The navigation on this site by CASA of Williamson County, Texas is a great example of a simple, straightforward menu.

For example, you could have a navigation item called "Get Involved" with sub-items entitled "Ways to Give," "Volunteer," and "Advocate." Your Ways to Give page could then include a link to your Amazon wishlist, in-kind donation policy, information about planned gifts, and other methods of support. Remember, you should still have a prominent Donate button in your navigation menu!

Step Three: Use Clear Language

While it may be tempting to use cute or attention-grabbing phrases on your site navigation, your users will appreciate straightforward labels. If you've ever been to a restaurant that uses unusual descriptors for their bathrooms, you know how irritating it can be to not immediately understand something that should be very clear.

Use plain, easily-recognized language to describe what content is housed under each drop down. "About Us" and "Events" may seem tired or played out, but there's a reason everyone uses them—they work!

Step Four: Be Consistent

Modern internet users expect a seamless experience on websites. One of the easiest ways to provide that is to create a navigation menu that's consistent on every page. It helps them find what they're looking for or browse if they don't have a destination in mind.

The easiest way to ensure your menu is identical on every page is to use a "sticky menu." A sticky menu—also called a "persistent navigation bar"—"sticks" in the same position as someone browses your

website. Regardless of how far down a page someone scrolls, which links they click, or which pages they visit, your users will always be able to access your navigation (and the next page they're looking for) from wherever they are.

If your content management system doesn't allow for sticky navigation, it's important to apply any changes to your navigation menu on every page. That's one of the reasons it's so beneficial to keep your menu simple—it's much easier to make changes across your site when you're not managing dozens of different navigation items.

Step Five: Include Your Donate Button

Nesting information about the various ways people can support your nonprofit under one "Ways to Give" page is one way to simplify your navigation items, but it's still important that your Donate button be clearly visible in your menu. What's more, it should only take a single click to land on your donation page.

When you set up your site navigation, make sure to include a Donate button that is very easy to see; the best way to do this is to make that button a color that contrasts with the rest of your navigation items. If your primary site navigation is navy blue, for example, you could make your Donate button a sunny yellow. Use your branding colors here! Your goal is for someone to be able to find your Donate button within seconds of your site loading and for them to be taken immediately to your donation page when they click that button.

Step Six: Add a Search Bar

Not everyone will want to look through your navigation menu, and that's okay. Add a search bar to your site for anyone who prefers to look for information that way. This is also a valuable accessibility tool and will make your site more usable for people who will navigate your site by voice. (More on accessibility in upcoming modules!)

Once you've ensured your navigation is straightforward and easy to use, you can turn your attention to optimizing some other aspects of your site.

Pay Attention to Load Times

You just spent a great deal of time making sure your site is easily navigable for visitors with short attention spans. Now it's time to make sure your site loads quickly enough that those visitors don't lose interest before they are able to read your main menu.

How long it takes your site to load will have a dramatic impact on whether or not people will stick around to learn more about your work. A 2022 study by Digital.com took a look at peoples' impressions of load times for eCommerce sites: More than half of online shoppers expect a page to load in three seconds or less, and businesses with pages that load too slowly leave a negative impression on 45% of their customers.

That study may have focused on eCommerce websites, but the takeaway is universal: People will not wait for a slow site to load.
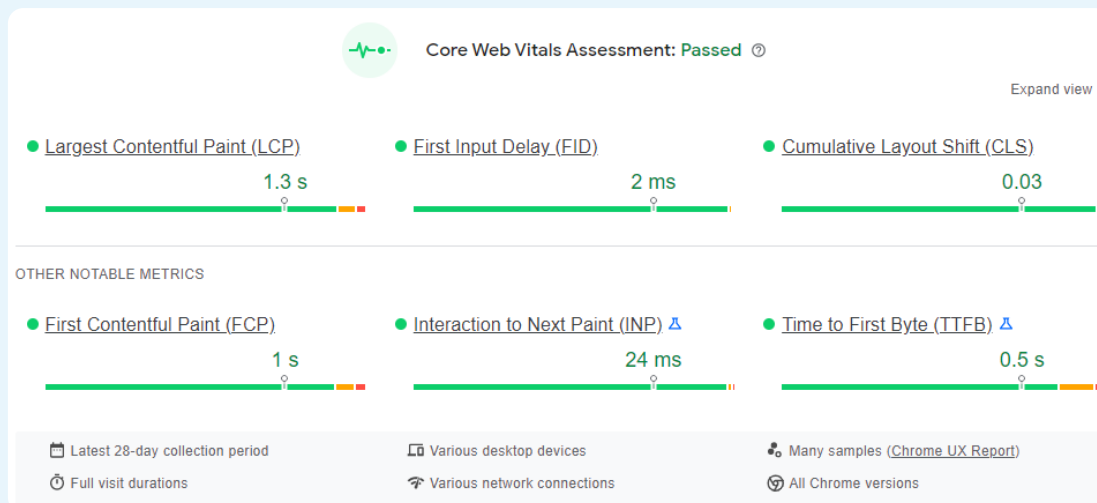
Neon One Quick Tip
Connecting your Neon CRM donation form to your website is easy. Simply navigate to "Forms & Pages," then choose the form you want to link to your donate button. Click "Copy Form URL" (it's in the upper right-hand corner) and attach that link to your Donate button.

Take a moment to evaluate how quickly your website loads. To get started, you can use Google's PageSpeed Insights tool. Simply enter your website's address and you'll see your page speeds and recommendations for improvement.

MORE THAN HALF OF ONLINE SHOPPERS EXPECT A PAGE TO LOAD IN THREE SECONDS OR LESS

Using Google's Page Speed Insights will help you identify opportunities to improve your website's load times. We screenshotted Neon One's page speed as an example.

If you are in the red or yellow, you've got some work to do! Google will provide insights on where you need to make changes, but here are some best practices you can implement to improve and maintain a quick load time:

- **Compress your images:** Large files will slow down your load time, and image files can be enormous. Instead of uploading full-sized images directly into your CMS, resize and then compress them. Your CMS may include a built-in image editing tool that can do this for you, or you can use one of the many free options online.

- **Optimize your code to help minimize load times:** If you're using custom CSS or other coding to modify your website, check out this resource from Google on how to improve your page speed.

- **Use your redirects wisely:** Directing traffic from one page to another is necessary, sometimes, but multiple redirects get complicated quickly.

Optimizing your site so it loads quickly will help you make the most of the precious seconds people will spend evaluating your site. When your homepage (and other pages) are quick to load, it helps people understand your work and mission at a glance. If they also include a clearly-labeled navigation menu, people will have few reasons to click away.

Make It Mobile

More than half of all web traffic comes from people using mobile devices. If your site doesn't work well on mobile devices, fewer people will be willing to use it—and it can have other impacts, too. Google's algorithm

now prioritizes sites that work well on mobile devices; if your site doesn't, you won't appear in search results.

Nearly all website builders offer mobile-responsive design, but there are still a few best practices you can implement.

- **Use clear calls to action:** Instead of writing longer copy that culminates in a CTA, make your ask up front.

- **Make those CTAs on large buttons:** Have you ever tried to tap a text link on a phone? It's so easy to miss it! Use buttons instead—you'll make your CTAs stand out, and it will be easier for people to act upon them.

- **Choose good fonts:** Your branding document probably includes guidelines on the fonts you'll use in various locations—including on your website— and some standards for using them. When you choose a font for use on your website, make sure you choose something that will be legible on small screens. Highly embellished fonts, tiny font sizes, low-contrast colors, and blocks of text are hard to decipher, especially on phones.

- **Pay attention to those load times:** Users are impatient for sites to load when they're on their desktops; there's even less time to waste when someone is on the go. When you test your site speed, make sure you check it on your mobile device, too.

- **Make your contact information easy to find:** Mobile visitors may be looking for a quick way to call you or get to your facility. Make sure they can easily find important information with just a couple of taps.

- **Regularly test your site on mobile devices:** It's one thing to use a mobile-responsive CMS. It's another entirely to use your site on a phone or tablet. When you make additions or updates to your site, always test those changes on a variety of devices. Can you easily navigate your site with one hand? Do you have to pinch and zoom anywhere? Are parts of your pages cut off? Double-checking your site's mobile usability will help you ensure your mobile visitors get the best experience.

Mobile traffic isn't the exception any more. It's the norm! Having a site that performs well on mobile devices is the best way to engage your supporters where they are—on their phones.

Neon One Quick Tip
Good news for Neon One users—every form, page, or website you build in our system is already optimized to perform well on mobile devices. Following the best practices outlined in this section will just make the experience even better.

This week, you learned some strategies for creating a well-designed website. Here are some takeaways:

1. Outdated or poorly-designed websites can negatively impact your nonprofit. Experiencing difficulty updating your site, slow load times, poor mobile performance, and old branding elements are all signs that it's time for a refresh.

2. Your homepage is usually the first place a site visitor will land. Make it easy for people to understand who you are and what you do.

3. Building a simple, straightforward navigation menu is one of the most important steps you can take toward keeping people engaged on your site. Your navigation should be well-structured, plainly labeled, and easy for people to use.

4. Visitors to your site will typically wait only a few seconds for your content to load. Improving load times will help engage site visitors.

5. Your website should be more than just mobile-friendly; it should be as simple and easy to navigate your site on a phone as it is on a desktop.

Coming Up Next …

Next week, you'll explore one of the biggest topics in the nonprofit world: Storytelling. You'll learn about:

- The reliable storytelling structure you can use as you share your own stories
- How to source good narratives to tell on your site
- Tips for sharing stories ethically
- Strategies for choosing compelling photos that reinforce your stories

You could have the most compelling mission in the world, tell the most beautiful stories, and have the most eye-catching branding in the world. But, if your website isn't well-designed and easy to use, people won't stick around long enough to learn how wonderful you are. Use this worksheet to evaluate your site's design and identify areas for improvement.

When was the last time you updated your site's design and main content? Think about big updates, like homepage redesigns or rewrites of key pages, not smaller updates like new blog articles.

_____

_____

If it's been more than a year or two, it's probably time to refresh! Using what you've learned about branding and design, write down the top 5 things you will update on your site.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Does your website include your current color palette, logo, fonts, and other brand elements?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you answered no, what needs to be updated?

_____

_____

_____

Does your homepage clearly convey your organization's mission, work, and values?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you answered no, what updates will you make?

_____

_____

_____

Does your homepage ask visitors to take a next step, like reading more, donating, volunteering, becoming a member, or signing up for a newsletter?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you answered no, what calls to action will you add to your homepage?

_____
_____
_____

Ask someone to go through your navigation menu with you. What feedback do they have for you? What, if anything, should you change or improve?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Use an accessibility checker like accessibilitychecker.org. How accessible is your website? How will you improve accessibility? (Accessibility Checker didn't ask us to include them here, we just think their tool is really useful. And it's free!)

_____
_____
_____
_____

Check your site with Google's mobile-friendly test. What, if anything, can you do to improve your performance?

_____
_____
_____
_____
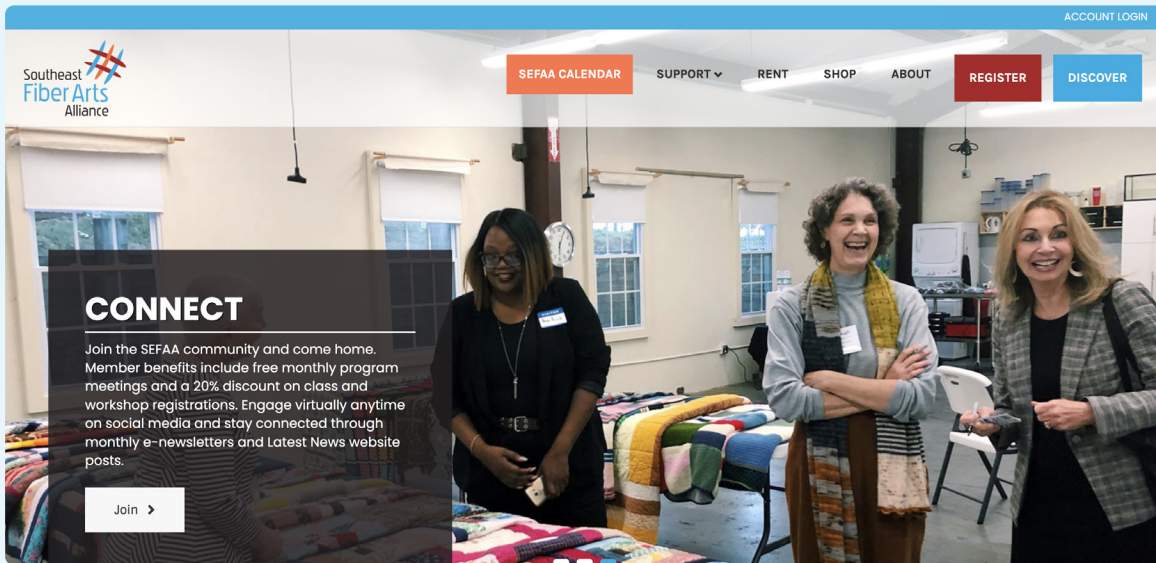
# Telling Stories On Your Website

People will visit your website to donate, volunteer, sign up for your services, or even just learn more about your cause because they want to get involved later on. No matter which action you want them to take, there's one surefire way to inspire them to get involved: Powerful storytelling. Whether someone is new to your mission or a longtime supporter, the stories you tell about your community, your work, and the people who benefit from your services create the emotional connection that moves people to take action.

This week, we'll dig into how you can help your website visitors form emotional connections with your organization. This section will focus mostly on people who are visiting your site to donate, volunteer, or buy a membership.

Using Stories to Connect People to Your Cause

Humans are hardwired to respond to stories. Take it from Pamela Rutledge, Ph.D., M.B.A: She's the Director of the Media Psychology Research Center and a professor of media psychology at Fielding Graduate University. [Pamela writes](#):

> "Stories are how we think. They are how we make meaning of life. Call them schemas, scripts, cognitive maps, mental models, metaphors, or narratives. Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make decisions, how we justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities, and define and teach social values."

When you tell stories on your website—or anywhere else, for that matter—you're helping people connect with your cause and the community you serve. When done well, storytelling can help you achieve a few key goals. Use good stories to:

1. **Explain your mission:** Share details about the problems your beneficiaries face and how your nonprofit works to solve them. This speaks to visitors' identities and motivations, and it can inspire them to support your cause.

2. **Form connections:** When you share beneficiary stories about your clients and the community you serve, you'll connect your site visitors to the real-life people they'll help when they get involved.

3. **Demonstrate impact:** By reminding people how their support helps the people you serve, it shows them how they can make a difference by donating, volunteering, buying a membership, or supporting your cause in other ways.

4. **Build trust:** It's also a subtle way to signal to people that their donation of time and money will be well-used. They won't have to wonder if their donation will help people: You will already have shown them that it will.

The Basic Storytelling Structure

To make an instant impact on your audience, you need a cohesive narrative that's easy for people to understand and respond to. Here's a basic storytelling structure you can use to guide you as you collect stories to share with your visitors:

- **Introduce your character:** Share insight into who they are, where they live, and what they're like. The more you can flesh out your character, the more realistic they'll be and the easier it will be for people to connect with them.

- **Give an overview of your character's story and circumstances:** What obstacles are they facing? What situations do they find themselves in that will move them to seek help from your organization?

- **Your character finds your organization:** In this phase, your character turns to your organization to help solve the problem they're facing.

- **Your character's circumstances improve:** How has their life changed since they came to your organization? If your character was facing food insecurity, how did your food pantry help them? If they needed medical care, how did your organization provide the services they needed?

By the end of your story, you've introduced a person (or person-like character; we'll cover more of that in a minute) who had a problem, and shared how your organization worked with that person to solve that problem. Now it's time for you to invite your reader to help make that solution possible for others.

There are lots of storytelling structures you can use as you share information about your work on your website. Feel free to get creative! But, if you need a simple, effective formula for relating information about your work and how others can make a difference by getting involved, this is a fantastic place to start.

Where to Source Stories

Deciding you want to tell a story is one thing. Finding a meaningful story to tell is another thing entirely. Here are a few different ways to source stories, plus some questions you can ask to help you uncover inspiring narratives to share with your visitors.

Talk to Clients

There's a reason this method is one of the most common for nonprofits. Who else can tell a story about overcoming negative circumstances better than the people who overcame those circumstances themselves?

If you can collect stories directly from clients, you'll want to ensure you collect and share those stories in an ethical way. (Don't despair–we'll cover that later on!) But some nonprofits may have a harder time than others, especially if there are privacy or safety concerns.

Interview your clients about their experiences. What motivated them to seek out your nonprofit? How have their circumstances changed after working with you? What would they like to share with your donors and other supporters? What do they want others to know?

After you've written your client's story, give them the opportunity to read it and make sure they know where and how you'll use their information. If your client is unhappy with the story, worried about how you'll share it, or doesn't react positively, rework the narrative and the way you've presented their story. This will help you ensure that you share their story in an ethical way that uplifts your client and gives them agency.

If you serve people who need to be kept anonymous and can't share their personal stories, you could also try creating a composite character whose story is loosely based on your clients' stories. Alternatively, you could try telling an anonymous story and making sure you omit any details that would help someone uncover the true identity of the person whose story you're telling.

Collect Stories from Volunteers

Volunteers are often the lifeblood of a nonprofit organization. They're the proverbial boots on the ground, the people who see and work out your mission on a daily basis. This makes them an excellent source of stories with unique perspectives.

If you're collecting stories from your volunteers, try asking questions like:

> **What made you get involved with our nonprofit?**
>
> - Why is this work important to you?
> - What's your favorite part of volunteering?
> - What's your favorite example of this organization making a difference?

This method can be a great way to source and tell stories about your work, especially if you're concerned about protecting the privacy and safety of your clients.

Ask Board Members About Their Stories

Have you ever wished your board members were more involved in supporting your development and fundraising activities? This might be a great way to get them more engaged. Your board members volunteer their time, talents, and money to your organization–they must be motivated by something! Tap into their motivations and see if you can turn them into stories. Ask questions like:

- What made you decide to get involved?
- Why is this mission important to you and the community?
- What's your dream for the future of this organization?
- What's your favorite story from your time on the board?

Who knows? Your board members might be more inclined to share your stories and appeals with their friends and family if they're the main character.

Involve Your Loyal Donors

You can also try sourcing stories from your loyal donors. If someone in your donor base has been giving to you over an extended period of time, something about your cause resonates with them. Ask some questions to uncover the reasons and motivations behind their support, like:

- Why did you decide to get involved in supporting this cause?
- Why do you stay involved year after year?
- Why is this work so important to you?
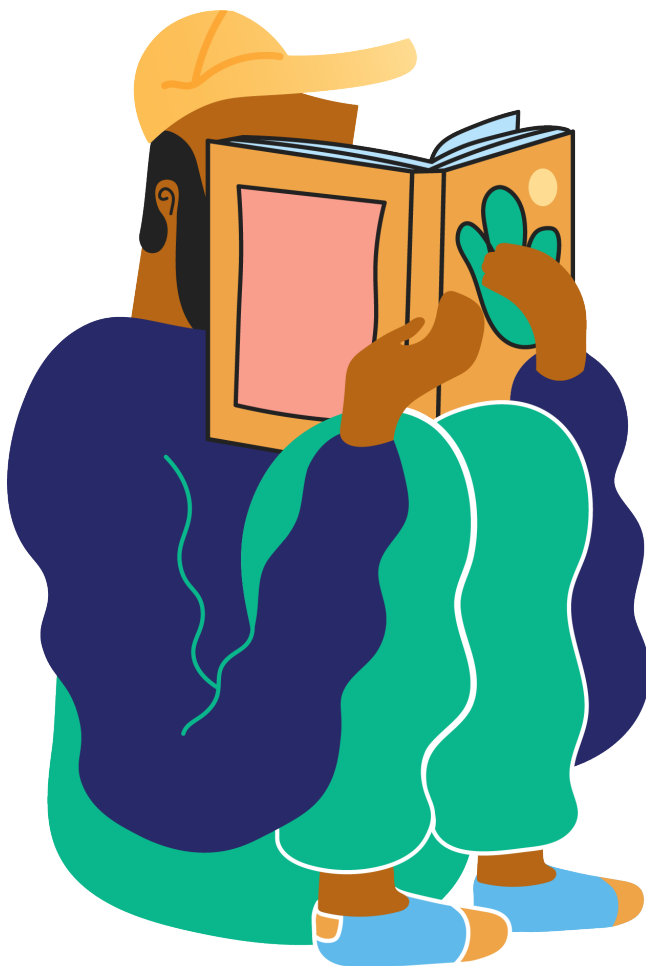
Sharing stories from donors, like sharing stories from volunteers and board members, provides a powerful source of social proof–it signals to your site visitors and potential supporters that people just like them support your cause. Your readers will see a peer who supports your work and a testimonial for why they should get involved. That is huge!

Pro Tip: Use the donor data in your CRM to help you identify loyal donors who may be willing to share their story with your organization. Long-time recurring donors, major gifts donors, longstanding corporate partners, and other dedicated supporters are outstanding options for this kind of outreach.

How to Tell Your Stories Ethically

Nonprofit professionals need to share stories that inspire people to support their work in any number of ways. But those stories should be told ethically–it's important that the stories that support fundraising campaigns and other activities don't degrade or tokenize the character in an effort to prompt the reader to take action.

Ethical storytelling is all about the dynamic you create between your character and the person reading their story. An unethically-told story includes a power imbalance: The reader is introduced to a one-dimensional character who's reduced to their circumstances. They're asked to stoop to support a person who can't help themselves. That power imbalance between the reader and the character is a major problem. An ethical story, on the other hand, presents the character as a person who needs help solving a problem; the reader is then invited to join that person and help them through a trying time.

In an unethical story, for example, a donor might be asked to donate to support "the homeless" who would never make it through the winter without their help. "The homeless" in this story aren't presented as nuanced people–they're presented as symbols of homelessness. The storyteller may talk about how desperate they are, include lots of details about the misery of living on the streets, and ask donors to support this group of "others."

Told ethically, though, this story could feature a person who happens to be experiencing homelessness or someone who's experienced homelessness in the past. It could tell their story–without dwelling solely on misery and desperation– and share details about how societal safety nets can still fail people before inviting readers to become part of the solution to a societal problem.

Here are some tips to keep in mind as you work toward sharing your stories both on your site and on other platforms:

- Focus on your character as a nuanced, dignified human being with agency, not a token or symbol of a problem.

- Position your organization, community, and donors as partners who work *with* your clients, not as benefactors of a nameless, faceless group.

- Get your client or character actively involved in the process and let them see the story before you use it (this is mostly important when you're sharing people-driven stories– the dog or mascot whose story you may tell will be less concerned with the way they're presented online!).

- Pay attention to the language you use–make sure your language centers the *people*, not their circumstances.

- Focus on success and growth, not desperation or need.

Whether you're a seasoned fundraiser or are brand new to nonprofit storytelling, this may seem challenging. And it can be! Be gracious with yourself, take time to evaluate your story and how it may come across to your readers, and be willing to experiment with different ethical storytelling techniques. Learning to tell stories ethically is a process, and you'll always find new ways to improve.

Reinforce Your Stories With Images

Websites are, by their nature, visually driven. You'll want to collect images to go along with your stories! You can revisit the branding and design modules of this action plan for guidance around using images on your website. Here, though, let's take a look at some of the ways you can source images to support the stories you tell on your site.

Take Photos During Day-to-Day Activities

Whether you're writing a blog article about a program or creating a person-centric story for a campaign, having a bank of photos to draw from will be immensely helpful. Take photos during your day-to-day activities, special events, programming, and even around the office. When you're telling a story about a student who benefitted from your tutoring program, you can then easily include a snapshot of one of your tutors working in your facility. If you're sharing a story about the impact of a fundraising event, you can share images from that same event. This is a simple tactic, but it's easy to forget about the significance of taking pictures while you work. Make it a priority!

Arrange Photos When You Interview Clients or Supporters

People connect with images of other people: Telling a story from a client, volunteer, board member, or other donor will have a greater impact when readers can put a face to the character's name. When you arrange to interview someone to collect their story, ask if you can take a few photos, too. This could be done formally and involve professional photographers, but it doesn't have to: Phone cameras have come a long way, and a nicely-framed photo taken with portrait mode can be an excellent inclusion on your site. You could also try taking candid photos of the people featured in your stories, or you could get the best of both worlds by combining more formal pictures with candid snapshots
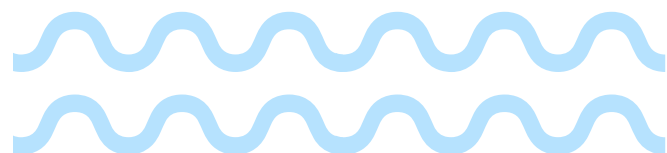
Try Using Carefully-Selected Stock Photos

There are lots of reasons you might have a hard time getting photos to share with your stories, especially if you're sourcing those stories from clients. Some people may be uncomfortable with having their picture taken; other times, it may be unsafe or unethical to share images of the people featured in your story. In those circumstances, you may want to consider using stock photos you get online.

When you're choosing images online, be careful to choose natural-feeling images that could reasonably represent the person whose story you're sharing. If you're familiar with the "Women Laughing Alone With Salad" meme, you're familiar with how cheesy and unrealistic many stock photos can be. Try checking out resources like Unsplash, Wikimedia Commons, and other free photo resources. You may be required to include photo attribution, but those platforms are full of useful images that aren't corny or over-staged.

If you do choose to use a stock photo, make sure you reference somewhere that the person in the image is a representation of your client and not the actual person whose story you're sharing.

Consider Using Anonymized Images

If you're sharing a story from a person whose identity should be protected–or if you're sharing a story about a composite character whose identity is loosely based on your client base–using an anonymized image can be a great way to add a human touch to the story without compromising their privacy. Taking a photo of someone in silhouette or photographing their hands or shoes (making sure you exclude anything that could be identified, like tattoos, birthmarks, or even distinctive jewelry) can help readers relate to a person even if they can't see their faces. If you're looking for examples of this, check out Humans of New York; many of their posts are of anonymous people whose pictures are compelling without showing their faces.

If You Can, Take Some Video

Many visitors to your website may enjoy seeing videos about your work in addition to reading stories or looking at pictures. If you can, take videos as well as pictures as you talk to people about their stories. That footage can be used for all sorts of things: You can use it to create videos for your site, add snippets of it to compilation videos that highlight your work, create impact updates, and more. Video taken during your day-to-day activities and events can be combined with client stories and testimonials to create highly engaging content you can use on your site and other platforms.

Sharing Your Story On Your Website

At this point, you've learned about both branding and site design. Now it's time for you to combine those practices with your storytelling. Here are some areas on your site you'll want to consider sharing these stories:

- **On your homepage**: Catch visitors' attention with striking imagery and headlines, then include a link or button they can follow if they want to read more.

- **On your "About Us" page:** Add links to your page that takes visitors to web pages or blog articles on which you're sharing important stories. When people learn a bit about your organization and want to know more about your impact, they can easily click over to high-impact stories from your clients and supporters.

- **On your blog:** One of the best ways to build a collection of stories is to share them on your blog. If your content management system includes a tagging system, consider tagging all your stories so it's easy for blog visitors to find them.

- **In annual reports or impact reports**: Many of your website visitors will research your organization as they decide whether or not to donate, volunteer, or otherwise get involved. That's why including your Form 990, financial statements, and annual reports on your website is so important: Many potential supporters will use those documents to vet your organization. It's also why it's a good idea to include your stories in your annual report and other impact updates: It's an easy way to ensure people see the real-life impact of your work as they research your organization.

- **On your donation form:** You won't want to tell an entire story on your donation form, but including references to your story and even some storytelling elements like quotes and images can help reiterate someone's decision to give. Try adding a great image and some succinct copy to your donation page that reminds donors what their gift will achieve.
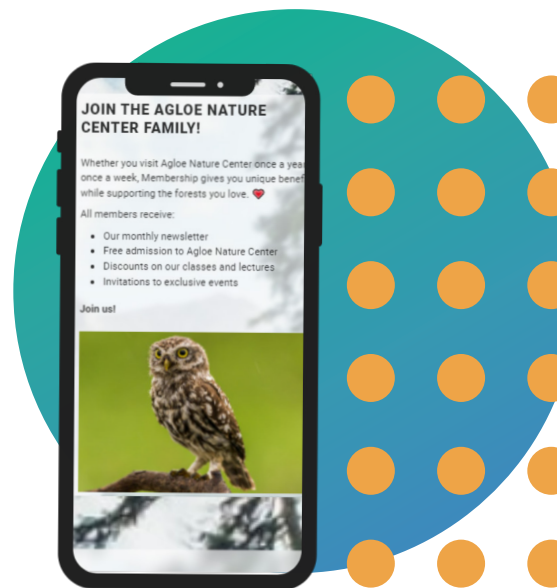
Remember, you won't need to create five different stories to share on each of these five areas of your site. You can absolutely use one story in multiple places. As your collection of ready-to-share stories grows, you can vary where and how you share each one.

Include Calls to Action In Your Stories

At the beginning of this module, we established that the stories you share should inspire people to take action. Whether you want someone to donate, volunteer, buy a membership, join your board, or support you in some other way, it's important to tell site visitors what you want them to do and then give them a way to act.

Here are some common calls to action and where to include them:

- **Read More:** When you share parts of your story on your homepage, ask people to read more. Then, include a link or button to the web page where they can read the full story.

- **Donate:** When you share your story on your blog, add a paragraph inviting people to support other people like your character. Specifically ask them to donate, then include a link to your donation form.

- **Sign Up:** After you've shared a meaningful story, invite the reader to sign up to receive your newsletter to stay updated on your organization.

You've probably noticed two recurring themes in each of those three pointers: You need to ask your site visitor to do something specific, then you need to give them a way to act upon your request. This is important! It can feel intuitive to you that someone would read a heartwarming client story and then navigate to your donation form to make a gift. But remember: What may seem intuitive to you is not necessarily what others will do. Always include a specific call to action, and always offer a link to the next step.

Neon One Quick Tip:

If you're a Neon CRM user, you have the ability to create an unlimited number of donation forms. Get creative! If you share a story and ask readers to donate, try creating a unique form to support that specific campaign. You can include elements from that particular story in the copy on your donation page, add an image of the person whose experiences you're sharing, and reinforce your form with impact statements that tie into the narrative you've told. It's a great way to create a seamless experience for people who are inspired to give by a specific story.

This week, you learned some strategies for sourcing, telling, and supporting stories that will inspire your site visitors. Here are some key takeaways:

1. **Humans are hardwired to connect with stories,** and telling stories on your website is one the best ways to keep visitors' attention and inspire them to get involved.

2. **There are lots of different ways to structure a story.** One reliable structure is to introduce a character and their circumstances, show readers a problem that prompted them to turn to your organization, and explain what positive impacts were possible for that character as a result. At the end, invite readers to make similar solutions available to other people by donating, volunteering, or offering other forms of support.

3. **Explore different sources for stories.** When you find yourself in need of a story, you might think immediately of telling a client's story. And that's perfect! If you need other sources, though, you might try talking to volunteers, board members, staff, or loyal donors. If you're feeling extra-creative, you could create your own mascot or character, too.

4. **Make sure you tell your stories ethically.** Get your story's character involved in the storytelling process, and be careful not to reduce that character to their circumstances.

5. **Images or video will help readers connect even more deeply** with the community you serve. Anonymized images or carefully chosen stock photos are great options when you need to protect someone's privacy.

6. **Use your stories in several places online.** Try sharing your stories to social media, in your newsletter, on your donation form, or anywhere else you connect with your supporters.

7. **Don't forget to include a call to action!**

Coming Up Next ...

This week, you learned about how to collect stories, how to source pictures that support them, and how to include calls to action that help people support your cause. In next week's module, we'll look at:

- How you can turn these stories into site content
- How to create a blog that supports your work and your overall goals
- How to format your blog and site content to help people find you on search engines

Week 4 Activity: Write an impact story you can use on your website. As you work on your story, ask yourself:

Who is your character?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What problem or situation did they face?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What inspired them to contact your organization?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How did your organization provide a solution to their problem or situation? What was the outcome?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How can others (donors, volunteers, members, board members, etc.) help provide solutions to others with similar problems?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What call to action will you include in your story?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What links will you include to help people act upon that request?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What images will you use to support your story? If you need anything, how will you source those images and other assets?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Neon One Quick Tip

If you've run a few different story-driven campaigns, you can use past campaign performance to help you choose what types of stories to tell on your website. Say you ran two major campaigns last year: One focused on a client story, and the other focused on a volunteer's experience with your nonprofit. If your client story inspired many more donations than your volunteer's story, you may choose to focus future fundraising campaigns on clients stories and save volunteer testimonials when it's time to recruit new volunteers.

Any data you have around donor motivators that you've collected via surveys, tracked in your notes after one-on-one conversations, or other historical trends can also inform your future stories. Your data is useful–put it to work!

Week 5

Website Content and SEO

Last week, you learned about the different steps you can take to identify and tell stories that connect your website visitors to your work and inspire them to get involved. This week, we'll explore how to turn those stories and other important pieces of information into content for your website. There's also a section on how to optimize your site so it's easy for others to find your organization through internet searches.

Here's what we'll cover:

» What to Include on a Nonprofit Website

» Blogging for Nonprofits

» Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Nonprofits

» SEO Tips for Nonprofit Websites

» Remember Your Page Titles and Meta Descriptions

» Recap

» Activity

What to Include on a Nonprofit Website

No two nonprofit websites will be the same. You have unique programs, unique stories, and a unique tone and voice. But there are some pieces of information you'll want to include on your site. Here's a list of some pages you'll want to build, plus some pointers on what content you should include on each.

Your Homepage

We talked a little about your homepage in Week 3, but we'll expand more on it here. This is usually where people will land when they visit your site for the first time, so make it easy for visitors to get an impression of your organization and find the information they want. Some elements to consider including on your homepage are:

- **Your hero image.** This is the first image your visitor sees, so choose something that helps them connect with your mission.

- **A headline and subheadline** that help visitors understand who you are and what you do at a glance.

- **Calls to action** that move visitors from your homepage to the pages you want them to visit. You might invite people to learn more about your programs, read more about a feature story, or visit your donation page.

- **Smaller modules that spotlight** different kinds of content your visitors may be seeking. Under your hero image, try featuring program pages, impact stories,

important updates, and other valuable content.

The goal of your homepage is to give visitors a great first impression of your nonprofit and make it easy for them to get to other pages they're looking for.

Your "About Us" Page

Many potential nonprofit supporters research organizations before they decide to donate or volunteer. It's important to have an "About Us" page that contains key information a potential supporter might want to see as they evaluate your nonprofit. Here are some pointers about what you might want to include:

- A brief summary of your organization's history, work, and impact on your community. You may also choose to include your mission and vision statements here or elsewhere on the page.

- A link to your annual report for the previous year or, even better, for two or more years. This will help interested supporters understand how their gift might make an impact.

- Your Form 990 and links to GuideStar or Charity Navigator profiles. Donors want to know that their money will be used wisely and financial transparency is an important way to show donors that you're a trustworthy organization.

- Links to a selection of your stories. Combined with your annual report and financial documents, this can help potential supporters understand that you're a legitimate organization that will use their support to make a real difference for your clients and your community.

There are other kinds of content you may choose to include on your "About Us" page, too. You might include a directory of your staff, a list of the members on your board, contact information or interest forms, and links to other important pages on your site.

Program Pages

If you offer different programs to the people in your community, you'll want to make sure you include important information about what you do, how your programs help your community, and how to get involved. You may want to consider including forms you can use to collect information from people who are interested in participating in your programs.

Opportunities to Get Involved

How can people support your work? If someone lands on your website and decides to support you, it should be easy for them to act upon that decision. Try building a page (or even multiple pages) for people who are interested in supporting you by:

- **Volunteering**: If you rely on volunteers, make it easy and appealing for people to sign up to volunteer with you. Try including information about different volunteer opportunities, impact statements that help potential volunteers understand how they'll make a difference, and any requirements you have for the people who are interested in getting involved. You might also want to include a volunteer interest form you can use to collect information about the people who want to support you in this way.

- **Your donation form:** It's important that people be able to navigate to your donation form with a single click in your navigation. We'll dig into how to build a great donation form in a later module but, for now, remember the importance of making your donation form immediately accessible from any page on your website.

- **Non-monetary donations:** There are lots of ways donors can support your cause without pulling out their credit card. Consider creating a page separate from your standard donation page that lists other ways people can get involved. This is an ideal place to share things like your nonprofit's wish lists, in-kind donation policy, your planned gift program, online store, peer-to-peer fundraising, and other support opportunities.

The key when sharing different ways to support your organization is to make information easy to find and act on. If someone lands on your site looking for ways to give, they should be able to find the right information and act upon it quickly.

Educational Content

Your nonprofit exists to solve a problem. This is true whether you're working toward eliminating food insecurity, funding medical research, or running art classes for students. The people who choose to support you are partners in solving that problem and they may be looking to learn more about it.

If you have any educational content around the issues you're looking to solve, make it available to potential supporters. What problems do you address with your work? Why is your work valuable? What impact—tangible and intangible—will your work have on your community? All of this information can be compelling to people who are evaluating your nonprofit and deciding if they'll give to your cause.

Your Blog

Not every nonprofit will have a blog. Some will have a blog, but they won't necessarily call it that. But, whether you call it a blog or "Our Stories" or "Tales from The Field" or another title entirely, it's important that you have an accessible place to tell stories, relate updates, and share information.

Blogging for Nonprofits

Blogs are an easy way to publish impact stories, share important updates, explain program information, highlight testimonials, and more. Instead of building individual pages for each of these types of content, you can simply write a blog article.

Blogging is also beneficial for nonprofits who are looking to increase traffic to their website. Search engines love seeing that a website is regularly updated; instead of constantly writing and rewriting content on your main site pages, you can update your site by posting new articles and content on your blog.

Putting your content in blog articles also gives you the opportunity to easily share that content on other channels. Whether you're sharing a heartwarming story as part of a fundraising campaign or announcing a new program offering, you can use that blog article on your social media channels, newsletters, emails, and even display ads. Share an excerpt, quote, or summary of the content in the article, then include a link to your blog page for people who want to learn more. Using this technique, you can share an article over and over again using different language or media, driving traffic to your website and getting more mileage out of your content than you would if you were only to share it in one place. Sending people to your website also gives them more opportunities to learn about your work and donate to your cause.

Whether you're revamping your "About Us" page or posting a heartwarming story to your blog, it's important that they're optimized to appear in search engine results. That will help you attract more traffic to your site, which will expose more people to your mission, your work, and how to get involved.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Nonprofits

Search Engine Optimization (SEO for short—that's what we'll use from now on) is the practice of formatting your site's content in a way that makes it easy for people to find you using search engines. The way you set up your site and present your content will impact your visibility on services like Google, Bing, Yahoo Search, and others.

How Do Search Engines Work?

Before you optimize your site, it's useful to understand how search engines work. Here's a brief summary of what happens behind the scenes as search engines evaluate your page and decide how it will rank in internet searches.

1. When you publish a page on your site, search engines will "crawl" your site. Essentially, a bot scans your page, finds

keywords, decides what the content is about, and makes some assumptions about how valuable the page is for users. When you optimize your content, you're making it easier for search engines to understand your page's content and value so they deem it worthy of showing up in search engine result pages (SERPs) for people who are searching for that content.

2. Once your page has been crawled, it's indexed. Put simply, this just means that it's added to a search engine's catalog of pages. When someone searches for a keyword, the engine's algorithm will pull relevant pages from its index that contain that keyword. The better optimized a page is, the higher it will appear in the search results.

3. Pages are periodically re-crawled. Making improvements to your page, linking to your page in other places, periodically updating its content or formatting, and other activities will help show those spiders that your page is valuable and increase its visibility in search results.

Anyone posting on the internet has to balance making their content appealing to a search engine's algorithm and making it appealing to their human readers. Whether you're creating pages for your site or updating your blog, prioritize making them useful for your site visitors first, then use these tips to format them in a way that improves your performance in internet searches.

SEO Tips for Nonprofit Websites

SEO can feel overwhelming. There are people whose whole careers are dedicated to understanding different search engines' algorithms, keeping up with updates and changes that impact search engine performance, and writing and formatting online content. In this section, we'll focus mostly on Google—it's the most commonly used search engine, so it's almost certainly the tool most of your site visitors will use to find you online.

These tips are high-level insights into how you can properly format your site—if you're interested in learning more about each, there are lots of resources available to you online.
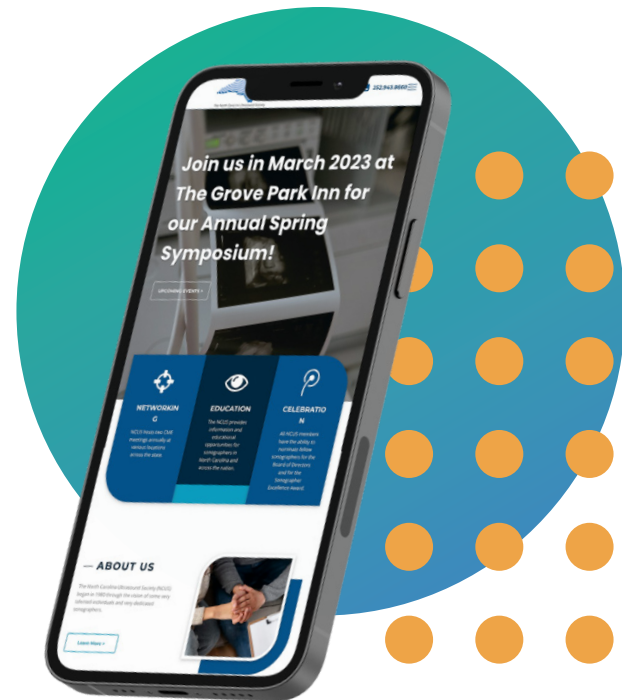
Set Up Your Google Business Profile

Creating a free Google Business Profile is a useful way to make your nonprofit visible in Google searches. Since Google is by far the most widely used search engine, this is an invaluable tactic. After you've set up your profile, you can add links to your website, your phone number and address, and other key information. When someone Googles your nonprofit's name, they'll be able to visit your site, call you, get directions to your facility, and more with a single click. To learn more about setting up and managing your profile, visit this resource from Google.

Optimize Your Page for Mobile Search

More than 60% of Google searches happen on mobile devices. As a result, Google prioritizes websites that perform well on smartphones and tablets. Even if your site is well-optimized in other ways, it will perform relatively poorly if it's not user-friendly for people using mobile devices.

Your site's design, layout, font size, images, and other elements will all impact how mobile-friendly it is. Not sure if your website is mobile optimized? Google's Mobile-Friendly Test will evaluate your site and make recommendations for improving your performance. Week 3 is full of pointers for making your site mobile-friendly— check back there if you need a refresher!

Keep an Eye On Your Page Speed

Here's another topic we touched on in Week 3. Page load times have an impact on your search rankings because they're such an important part of your visitors' experience. When your site takes too long to load, users will get frustrated and navigate away. Search algorithms want to point users to sites that give their users positive experiences, so they'll penalize pages with long load times.

Haley Boeschen, brand and corporate web developer at Neon One, says that the first thing she checks when a page loads slowly is image size. She says: "Hero images should be 1600-1920 px wide to cut down on load time. There are also some great plugins that will automatically compress images for you and track your page performance. We use one called Smush PRO By WPMU DEV. Google also provides a tool called PageSpeed Insights to check your URL and get notes on what is slowing down your website."

You can improve your load times by taking other steps, like:

- Hosting videos or other large files on third-party sites and embedding them instead of hosting them on your site itself

- Using a plugin or setting in your Content Management System that allows caching

- Using a content delivery network

- Minimizing redirects

"If you're using Neon Websites, you can turn on lazy loading of images and widgets," Haley says. "If you're using custom fonts, you can toggle on the "Show default system fonts while custom fonts are loading" so site visitors can start reading instantly."

We go into more detail about each of these strategies (plus other SEO strategies) in our article [Nonprofit SEO: 10 Tips to Optimize Your Website.](#)

Format the Content on Your Pages

Believe it or not, the way you format the copy on your page has a huge impact on how your page appears in search results. You'll want to use headings and sub-headings to structure your content in a way that shows a clear hierarchy on your page. This is helpful for both your site visitors and search engines!
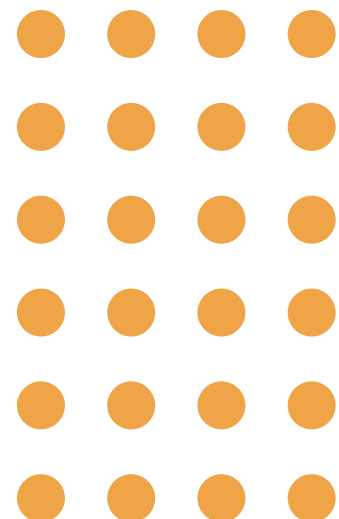
For visitors, it will be easier to scan your page and find the content that's interesting to them if it's laid out in a logical, easy-to-follow way. For search engines, it makes it easier for them to identify key information and index your page more appropriately. Here's what that can look like:

- Your page's title will be formatted as Heading 1 (H1)

- The main sections of your page's content should be formatted as Heading 2 (H2)

- Sub-sections of your main content will be defined in a hierarchical way: H3 will nest under H2, H4 will nest under H3, etc.

- Content under headings will be written in "paragraph" font

If you're not sure what this looks like in real life, take the first two sections of this module for example:

- "Week 5: Website Content and SEO" is H1
  - ° H2: What to Include on a Nonprofit Website
    - – H3: Your Homepage
    - – H3: Your "About Us" Page
    - – H3: Program Pages
    - – H3: Opportunities to Get Involved
    - – H3: Educational Content
    - – H3: Your Blog
  - ° H2: Blogging for Nonprofits

Structuring your content well is an important part of making your website readable for both your human visitors and your bot visitors. Strategically using important keywords in your copy—including in your headings and subheadings—will help all site visitors understand what content is on your page.

Remember Your Page Titles and Meta Descriptions

Your website builder should give you the ability to set specific page titles and page descriptions that will appear on SERPs.

Take, for example, this screenshot of a SERP for the term "Neon One Donor Database."

The page title, or "title tag," is "Donor Database Templates - Neon One"—it's slightly different from the H1 on the page and has been formatted specifically for the SERP. The meta description is the text that appears beneath the title tag, and it tells you exactly what the page is and what you'll find if you click on it. Well-formatted page titles and meta descriptions will make your page more appealing to search engines and users alike.

Use Important Keywords

Keywords are words or phrases that signal to search engines what kind of content they'll find on your page. Identifying keywords that will be important to your site visitors is the first step. If you want your organization to appear in search results for a particular word or phrase, you'll want to include those keywords on specific site pages.

For example, a food pantry in Polk County, Florida might want to appear in searches for "Polk County food pantries." They would choose keywords related to those searches, then add them to their homepage's headings and subheadings, title tag, meta description, alt text for images, and content. They might

also choose to target other keywords, like "Polk County Florida food pantry" or "Polk County food bank."

You can use a simple keyword research tool to identify words and phrases that might be valuable to use on your site. An easy way to start doing this is simply to type search queries into a search bar and see what other suggested keywords and queries appear. In this screenshot, for example, these are suggestions the food pantry may want to target if they're relevant.

It's important to include keywords on your pages where they're relevant. Resist the temptation to cram those important words and phrases into your copy too many times! Search engines want to send their users to pages that are relevant and valuable, so it's important for those words to appear on your page. But when they appear too much or in ways that aren't useful, site crawlers may perceive that copy to be spammy. This "keyword stuffing" can actually harm your search ranking instead of improving it.

Neon One User Tip: If you're using Neon Websites to host your site, adding an SSL certificate is a straightforward process. Click "Settings" in the left panel, then go to the "Site SSL" tab. Then, click "Generate Certificate." You can ensure every site visitor accesses your site through SSL by toggling on "Force visitors to use secure connection (HTTPS)."

Encrypt Your Site

Google wants to send its users to safe websites. If you've ever clicked on a search result and gotten a warning from Google that the site was unsafe, you know how much safety measures can impact your likelihood of visiting a particular page. If your site's URLs don't include "https" at the beginning of the addresses, look into the steps you need to take to make it safer. Talk to your webmaster, contact your web host, or request and install an SSL/TLS certificate on your site. Here's how to do it.

Link to Your Pages

The more you can link to your pages, the better you can signal to site crawlers that your page is important. Some linking strategies to consider include:

- Adding links to other pages. This is called an "internal linking strategy," and it makes it easier for visitors and crawlers to move around your site. Linking to a client story on your About Us page is an example of this tactic.

- Placing links to your site on other websites. This is called "backlinking," and it's a powerful way to signal to search engines that your page is relevant and valuable. This strategy can take some time and effort, but it will pay off! Corporate partners, your local chamber of commerce, community directories, and even sites like Charity Navigator and GuideStar are all great opportunities to link to your site.

- Linking to your site in newsletters, press releases, and even social media posts can also help drive traffic to your site, which signals to search engines that people find your content interesting and useful.

There are, of course, lots of other ways you can optimize your site for search engines, and more are added every day. Algorithms are updated all the time, so best practices are always shifting and changing. Luckily, search engine optimization is an invaluable tool, so it's easy to find information you can use to ensure your site stays relevant.

Content creation and SEO optimization for nonprofits is a big topic. Here are some key takeaways for this module:

1. Your homepage, "About Us" page, program pages, opportunities to get involved, and educational content are all important elements of nonprofit websites. Make sure each of these pages is populated with high quality content.

2. Blogging is an outstanding way to generate content for your website. Search engines will appreciate that your site is updated regularly, and your site visitors will appreciate being able to learn more about the stories and topics that are interesting to them. Once you've created a blog page, you can easily share that content on social media channels, newsletters, and other communications.

3. Search engine optimization is one of the best ways to rank in peoples' searches. Well-formatted content, thoughtful use of keywords, and linking to different pages will all help your content perform well in search engines.

4. You can make your site perform even better by optimizing it for mobile, improving load times, and ensuring every page contains an accurate title and meta description. Make sure they're encrypted, too!

Coming Up Next …

This week, you learned about what content to include on your website and how to format that content in a way that makes it easy for internet users to find your site. Next week, we'll take things a step further—we'll cover:

- What website personalization is and why it's important
- How you can create websites that give visitors personalized content and experiences
- Technical strategies for making your site and its content accessible to everyone who lands on your pages

This keyword planner will help you create content that performs well in search engines. Here's how to use it:

1. First, choose your target keyword. This is the primary keyword you'll use in your headings, meta description, page title, and body copy.

2. Use a keyword research tool to identify other potential keywords you may also want to use in your content. Simply enter your keyword into the research tool and choose interesting secondary keywords from the resulting list of suggestions.

3. If they're provided by your keyword research tool, track the average monthly search volumes, difficulty, and competition for each keyword you research. This will help you prioritize the most important ones: Keywords that have high search volumes and low difficulty scores, for example, would be top priority. Keywords that have lots of competition might be lower priority for you.

4. Use your research to prioritize your keywords.

5. Track your progress by noting when keyword-focused content is completed, and make sure to add a link to that page for easy reference later on.

OPEN KEYWORD PLANNER

Technical Optimizations & Personalization

Last week, you learned how to create content that catches donors' attention and inspires them to support your work, plus some techniques you can use to rank well in search engines. This week, we'll look at some practical ways you can format and support that content so it's easy to absorb by everyone who visits your website. We'll look at three different topics: Personalization techniques, steps you can take to improve your site's accessibility, and security measures you should implement to keep your visitors safe.

Let's get started!

Why Is Personalization Important?

Giving your site visitors the best possible experience is an important part of building affinity with them. A good website experience will make them feel more favorably about your organization, and they'll feel more comfortable spending time reading and interacting with your content. You'll probably have some goals for the different pages on your site—you may want visitors to donate, for example, or you may want them to sign up for a newsletter, inquire about volunteering, or simply spend some time learning about your organization. Regardless of your goals, your audience will be more likely to do what you want them to do if they feel safe doing so.

Showing your visitors relevant content, making it easy to use and absorb that information, and signaling to your audience that your site is safe will all help.

PERSONALIZATION IS CHANGING YOUR SITE'S CONTENT, MESSAGING, AND (TO SOME EXTENT) DESIGN BASED ON A VISITOR'S CIRCUMSTANCES.

Use Personalization to Engage Your Audience

If you've done any reading about how to create a compelling website, you may have encountered some articles on using personalization techniques to reach different audiences. Personalization is an important way to grab (and keep!) your audience's attention span. Here's what it is and how you can use it on your own site.

What Is Personalization on a Website?

Put simply, this refers to changing your site's content, messaging, and (to some extent) design based on a visitor's circumstances. Some of the most common factors include a visitor's location, history on your site, and even date or time of day.

When you work personalization into your website, you'll do so based on rules. For example, you might create a rule that says, "If someone is visiting my site for the first time, show them our impact video that introduces visitors to our mission and work. If someone visits a second time, show them an interest form they can submit to get more information about our work." Pop-up messages, site copy, videos, design elements, and other forms of content may all be tweaked so it's as relevant as possible to each visitor.

In week one of this website optimization action plan, you learned that the average attention span for a human is 8.25 seconds. It's easy for your site visitors to get distracted! Using personalization tactics to show them relevant information can help you keep them focused.

Types of Personalization

The different rules you can use to make your site more personal typically fall into three different buckets: Rules based on the date and time, the number of times a visitor has landed on your site, and your visitor's location. Adding these types of personalization to your website allows you to show relevant content to your site visitors and ask them to take an action when they're most likely to do so.

Let's take a look at each.

Rules That Show Content Based on the Date and Time of Day

You can create rules that show site visitors different content based on the date and time of their visit. If you're running a special campaign for GivingTuesday, for example, you can show visitors a video about your GivingTuesday campaign and an appeal to donate. The day after GivingTuesday, you can show them content that celebrates your community's generosity, shares how much you raised, and gives details about how that money will make a difference.

Rules That Show Content Based on Your Visitors' Past History

This is one of the best ways to create a customized experience for your site visitors. You can show them different content based on how many times they've visited your site in the past. So, for example, you could show an impact video or high-level storytelling content to someone who's visiting your site for the first time. On their second visit, you can ask them to fill out a form that collects important information about who they are and what their motivations are. When they visit a third time, you can prioritize content that asks them for a donation.

Rules That Show Content Based on a Visitor's Location

Where your site visitor is located can impact the way they choose to support you or their interest in your work. If someone is local to your organization, for example, you can show them information about an upcoming event. For non-local visitors, you can show them your standard website content. Your non-local site audience will almost certainly be unable to attend a local event, but visitors in your area might want to attend. Using this technique will help you show content to different groups of people that gives them relevant ways to support your cause.

Make Your Site Accessible to Everyone Who Visits

Is your site usable for people using screen readers? What about folks who are colorblind or have visual impairments? Can someone navigate your site by voice? Making your site accessible to everyone—including people with disabilities—is an important tactic for anyone looking to provide an equitable experience for their visitors.

What Does Accessibility Mean? Why Is It Important?

Simply put, "accessibility" means that your site and all of its components are set up in a way that people with disabilities can use them.

There are lots of different kinds of disabilities. You probably think of things like auditory or visual impairments that could prevent someone from watching a video or reading the copy on an event page. But there are other things to consider: Some of your site visitors may have cognitive or neurological conditions that make it hard for them to interact with your site. Others may need to navigate your site by voice due to an injury. Still others may not need screen readers but still need high-contrast colors to help them read what you have to say. Adhering to accessibility standards will make your site navigable for everyone who visits regardless of any disabilities that might impact the way they engage with your page.

Accessibility optimization can make it easier for abled people to use your site, too. How many times have you watched an internet video with the sound off and read the captions because you're in a public place? Have you ever squinted at your phone as you try to read something in bright sunlight? How about trying to use a website when your broken arm is in a cast? Accessibility measures will positively impact people in circumstances like these, too.

How to Improve Your Site's Accessibility

It's important that anyone is able to navigate and understand your website. Here are some different steps you can take to make your website accessible to everyone.

Follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
You don't have to guess what steps to take to make your site as accessible as possible. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) will guide you in ensuring your site is:

- **Perceivable**, which means all information and interactive elements are presented in a way that makes it easy for people to perceive them

- **Operable** by everyone who visits, including people who use accessibility aids like screen readers and voice commands

- **Understandable**, which means your site's content and other elements are understandable to different visitors

- **Robust,** which means your content must be able to be interpreted by users and any technologies or tools they use to interact with content online
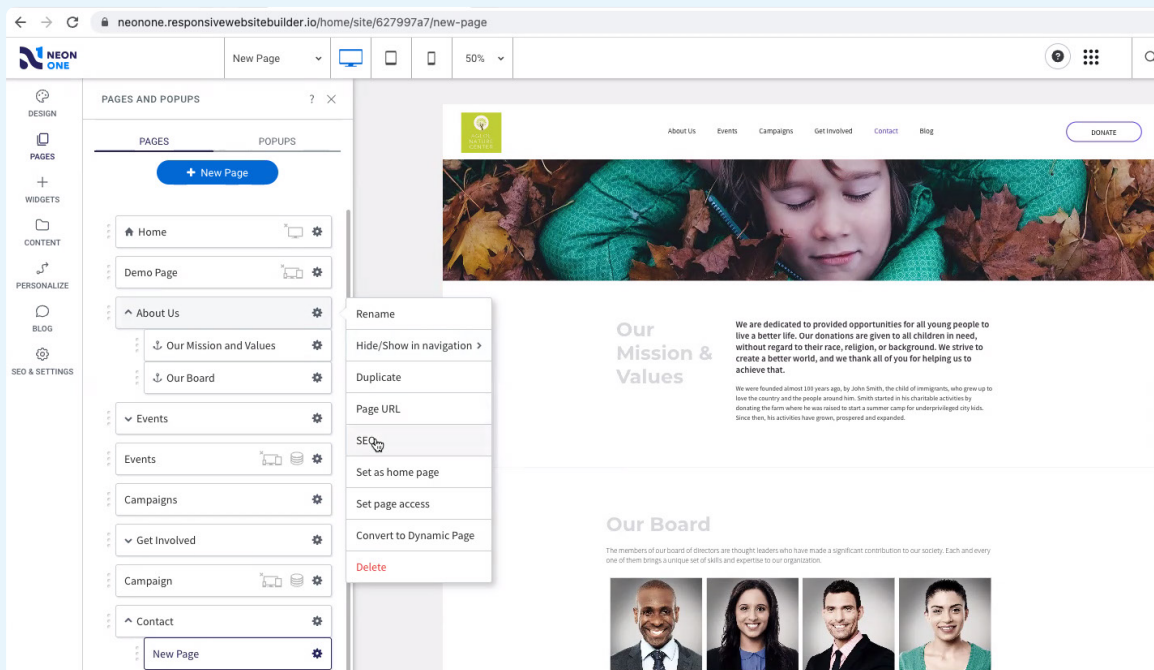
Web accessibility is important enough that there are entire organizations dedicated to teaching how to implement strategies that make your site usable to everyone. That said, let's take a brief look at some straightforward steps you can take to make your site easy to use for everyone who visits.

Your Site Should Be Well-Structured and Easy to Navigate

Remember going over website navigation best practices in Week 3? It's an important topic, especially in the context of web accessibility. Spend some time ensuring your site is well-organized, and make sure your navigation is consistent across all pages on your site. Assign very clear page titles and headings to all pages and make sure they're consistent. If you link to a page that's entitled "Ways to Donate" in your navigation menu, for example, the page title should also be "Ways to Donate." If the navigation item and page title are different, it can be confusing for people, especially if they're using a screen reader or another accessibility tool.

It's also important to take steps that make your site navigable in other ways, too. Include a search bar people can use to find the content they want without clicking through your navigation items or menu. You'll also want to make sure you can navigate your site using a keyboard instead of mouse or trackpad.

View how you can customize your navigation menu in Neon Websites by updating the Navigation Links widget and dragging it to where you want it to appear on a page. Adding it to the header (or footer) of your site will ensure that it appears on every page without you having to manually add it to each one.

Use Alt Text for Your Images

Site visitors with visual impairments may use a screen reader to interact with your site. Screen readers can interpret text on your site, but they need some help interpreting images. That's where alt text comes in.

Alt text is language you use to describe the images you use on your site. When you upload an image or graphic for use on your site, you should have the option to add text that describes what it looks like and why it's important. Don't skip adding alt text to your images unless they're used purely for decorative purposes!

When you add alt text for the different images on your site, be descriptive so screen readers can help users understand what your images look like. You don't have to limit yourself to being purely objective in your descriptions, either: Feel free to use emotive language and anything else you think will surprise and delight the people who rely on alt text. Just make sure you keep it short and sweet!

Here's an example:

Good:

Alt Text: White coffee cup on a table.

Better:

Alt Text: A full white coffee cup rests on a sunlit wooden table.
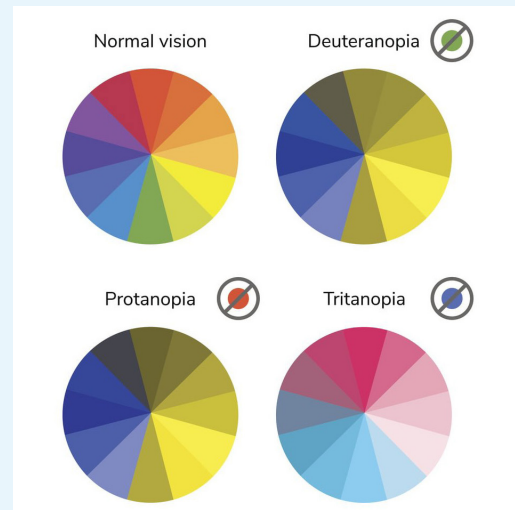
Alt text helps your visitors understand the imagery you've included on your site. There are other benefits of well-written alt text, too. When done correctly, your alt text can also include keywords for your page, which has the added benefit of helping that page rank in search results.

Provide Captions and Transcripts for Videos

Videos are a popular way to inform site visitors about your work, your community, and how their support can make a difference. The best way to ensure your messaging is presented as effectively as possible is to include captions and transcripts for your videos.

This is a necessary step toward making your videos accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. It's also helpful for people who are watching videos and don't want to turn on their sound! A 2019 study by Verizon Media and Publicis Media found that providing captions becomes increasingly necessary as more and more people watch videos on the go. The study found that 69% of people watch videos without sound when they're in public, and 25% watch without sound in private. 80% of the people in the study who used captions weren't hard of hearing, and the same percentage of people indicated they are more likely to watch an entire video when it includes captions.

When you create videos, you can use one of the many closed captioning or transcription tools available for creators. Some platforms like YouTube and even tools like Zoom and PowerPoint include auto-generated captions, which you can edit for accuracy. The Neon One team loves using Otter.ai (they're not paying us to tell you this, we just really like it). Whatever tool you decide to use, know that adding captions and providing transcripts to your users will increase the likelihood that they'll watch and respond to your videos.
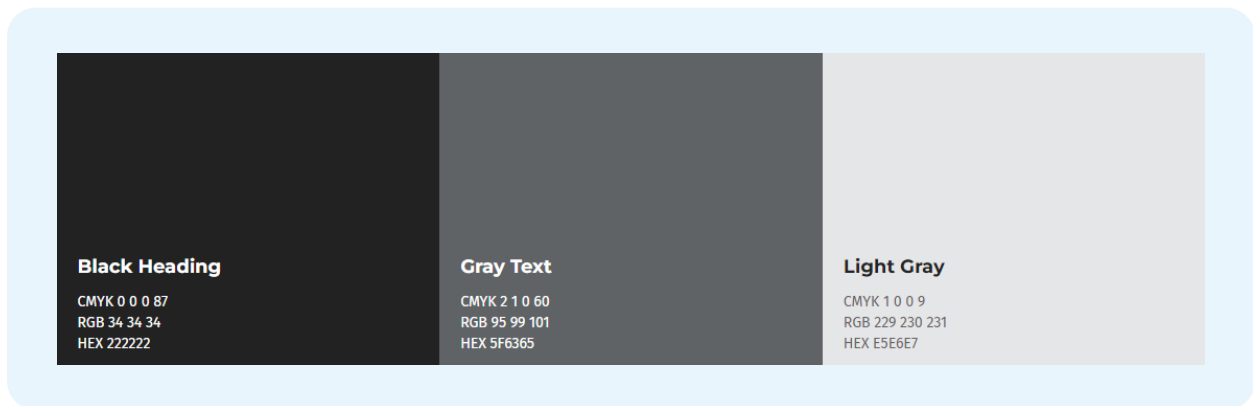
Pay Attention to Colors

The branding exercises you worked through in week two of this action plan included identifying the colors associated with your organization. When you applied your branding to your website, you probably experimented with using those colors in different ways, like choosing the color schemes for your navigation menu, page backgrounds, and graphics. Here are some extra steps you can take to ensure those colors don't interfere with your site's overall accessibility.

According to The Bureau of Internet Accessibility, "Color contrast is the difference in light between font (or anything in the foreground) and its background." There should be enough contrast between the colors on your site that it's easy to perceive the differences between different elements. Using contrasting colors on your site will make the different elements on your site easy to perceive by different website visitors, whether they have a disability (like colorblindness) or simply using their phone in bright sunlight.

What does this look like in practice? Here's an example from Neon One's branding guide:

Black Heading	**Gray Text**	**Light Gray**
CMYK 0 0 0 87	CMYK 2 1 0 60	CMYK 1 0 0 9
RGB 34 34 34	RGB 95 99 101	RGB 229 230 231
HEX 222222	HEX 5F6365	HEX E5E6E7

Notice how the font color on the "Black Heading" and "Gray Text" areas is white, but the font on the "Light Gray" area is black. If that black text was white, the contrast between the font and the background would be too low: It would be hard to read, especially if the reader had visual impairments or was in very bright surroundings. As you work on your website, make sure you use high contrast colors so visitors can easily read what you have to say.

Ask for Feedback

Knowing how to make your site accessible can be challenging, especially for abled people who have never relied on accessibility tools. Aside from following the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, one of the best ways to ensure your site is usable for everyone is to ask for feedback.

In week one, you asked a friend to navigate your website and give feedback on how you can improve. You can do that here, too! You can also work with other organizations in your community that specifically serve people with disabilities; try working with them to help identify areas for improvement.

You'll also want to consider adding the option to submit feedback to your site, which is a great way to capture comments and requests from your audience.

Accessibility is important! You can dig deeper into these concepts in our blog article How to Create an Accessible Donor Experience Online.

ADHERING TO ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS WILL MAKE YOUR SITE NAVIGABLE FOR EVERYONE WHO VISITS REGARDLESS OF ANY DISABILITIES

Use Security Best Practices to Keep Site Visitors Safe

The third important way to give your site visitors a great experience is to have the appropriate security measures in place. Have you ever landed on a site that felt unsafe or untrustworthy? You probably left that site quickly! These security best practices will help prevent that from happening to your own site visitors.

How to Maintain a Safe Website

Web security, much like web accessibility and personalization, is a discipline unto itself. That said, let's take a closer look at three strategies you can use to keep your site safe.

Keep Your CMS Up to Date

As a reminder, your content management system—or CMS for short—is the platform you use to build, maintain, and update your site. Services like WordPress and other CMS platforms will periodically publish updates and security fixes. Make sure you apply them in a timely manner! Not keeping your CMS up to date makes you more susceptible to hacking, malware attacks, and other issues. Nothing will discourage people from visiting your website like malicious pop-ups, malware warnings, or inappropriate content from hackers and online troublemakers.

Get Your Security Certificates in Place

Look at the address for almost any website and you'll notice the letters "https" at the very beginning of the URL. That stands for "Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure," and it means, essentially, that the connection between your computer and the server that hosts the site is encrypted. That encryption keeps their session private and virtually eliminates the possibility of a third-party actor intercepting or interfering with that information.

If you don't have this in place for your own website, your visitors will probably receive a full-screen warning that their connection isn't private. They'll be encouraged to navigate away from your site; should they choose to proceed to your site, doing so will take several extra clicks. Having this encrypted connection in place is critical if you want people to visit and stay on your site, and it's especially important if you want them to donate. Nobody wants to enter sensitive information on an insecure site!
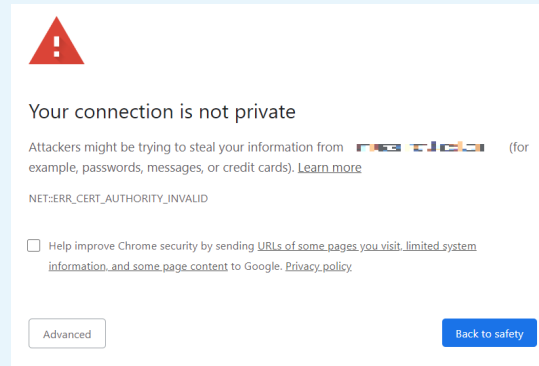
Note the "Back to safety" button that returns the user to their homepage: It's compelling! This explicitly warns people that an unencrypted page is unsafe and should not be visited. That's the last thing you want someone to see when they try to learn more about you or make a donation to your cause.

To make your site secure, you'll need an SSL certificate installed on your website. Here's a link to a Google resource that explains how to make that happen.


This is an example of the kind of warning message your visitors will see if your website isn't encrypted.

Neon One Quick Tip
You don't have to worry about updating your CMS, maintaining security certificates, or backing up your content in Neon Websites—those processes are built right into the system. In case you missed last week's module, here's a reminder: You can generate an SSL certificate for your site by going to "Settings" and navigating to the "Site SSL" area.

Maintain PCI Compliance

Don't feel bad if you're unfamiliar with the phrase "PCI Compliance"—it's not a topic that comes up frequently when you're learning about web security. "PCI DSS Compliance" stands for "Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard." That Standard is a set of guidelines set forth by all major credit card companies that are meant to keep consumers' personal and financial information safe any time they complete a transaction using a credit or debit card.

This isn't something your audience will necessarily look for when they visit your website—unlike site encryption, users won't see a warning screen when they visit a site for a nonprofit that isn't compliant with PCI guidelines. That said, staying compliant with the guidelines set forth by the Payment Card Industry is an important step toward keeping you and your donors, members, and other supporters safe.

Your payment processor—the vendor that helps you process donations and other transactions—should help you stay in compliance with these rules and regulations. In addition to using a vendor that's PCI compliant, you can use subtle signals on your donation and membership forms, storefront forms, and even in-person processing tools to show donors you're keeping them safe.

Even something as simple as adding a lock icon to your form can have a dramatic effect on supporters' willingness to support you. According to a NextAfter study that compared two forms—one with a security indicator and another without—showed a 126% increase in donations on the form that indicated it was secure. Security is important to donors, and it's your job to make sure they stay safe.

See that lock icon and the "Secure Payment" language at the bottom of this form? That will help potential supporters feel more comfortable about using their payment cards on your site. This is a form built using Neon CRM, but any online fundraising platform should have something similar.

You can learn more about the guidelines, what they entail, and why they're important in this blog article on PCI Compliance.

Neon One Quick Tip

If you're a Neon One user, you can enroll in our PCI Compliance program for no additional cost. We'll help you get (and stay) compliant with these important guidelines, and you'll receive $100,000 in protection in the event of a data leak.

Technical optimization and accessibility can feel overwhelming. Not to worry! This week, you learned some valuable takeaways, like:

1. Offering a personalized experience on your website is an invaluable way to give users a great experience—and great experiences keep users' interest and inspire them to get involved.

2. Types of personalization can generally be split into three categories: Date and time of day, number of past visits, and a user's location.

3. Another important part of designing a great user experience is making sure your website is accessible. That means you'll need to intentionally create a site that's usable for everyone, regardless of disabilities or outside circumstances.

4. Taking steps toward making your content accessible gives everyone a better experience. To start, follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Give your site a good structure and make it easy to navigate, even if someone is using a screen reader, their keyboard, or voice commands. Images should always be accompanied by alt text, and captions and transcripts should always be available for videos. Use contrasting colors so your content is easy to read, and give users the opportunity to send you feedback if they identify any issues.

5. Security is an important part of creating a positive user experience. Make sure your site has the proper security certificates in place to avoid warning screens, errors, and other disruptions. Make sure you install any CMS updates regularly, and take steps to maintain PCI compliance.

Coming Up Next ...

At this point, you've gathered compelling stories and filled your site with content that informs, inspires, and educates. After this module, you're ready to make that content easy to navigate and understand for everyone who visits your site, whether or not they have disabilities. You're also ready to ensure your site is secure and will keep those visitors safe, especially when they're submitting personal and financial information on your donation form.

Next week, we'll take a special look specifically at donation pages. You'll discover:
- Best practices for formatting your donation page
- How to create a form that makes giving easy
- How to use your confirmation page to start building relationships with your supporters

Go through your website and double-check your navigation and internal linking. Here are some things to keep an eye out for—use the space below to take notes about any issues you find, then use those notes to guide your technical optimization and website accessibility.

There's a lot covered in this document. Don't feel like you have to fix everything all at once! Optimizing your website is a long-term project; don't stress yourself out trying to finish it this week.

Technical Optimizations: The Basics
- Do all of the links in your site navigation work?
- Do the links on different web pages work?
- Do you still have any links to nonexistent pages visible to your users?
- Can you think of any pages you've created but haven't linked to anywhere?

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Technical Optimizations: Take It to the Next Level

- Do all of your pages have the correct page title?
- Do all of your pages have meta descriptions?
- Do your pages load quickly?

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Pro Tip: If you're ready to take your site to the next level, install Google Search Console and Google Analytics. Even if you don't use it for in-depth tracking, these tools can alert you to things like broken links. You can also keep an eye on traffic to important pages—if you realize that people aren't visiting a high-priority page, you might want to start digging around to find the issue.

Accessibility Optimizations: The Basics

- Does your site follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines?
- Is your navigation menu well-structured and clearly labeled?
- Do you include alt text for the images on your site?
- Does your site include a search bar visitors can use to find specific information?

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Accessibility Optimizations: Take It to the Next Level

- Do you use contrasting colors for site content?
- Do all videos on your site include captions and transcripts?
- Can site visitors easily submit feedback about accessibility measures not included on your site?

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Security Optimizations: The Basics

- Does your site have an SSL certificate?
- Have you installed any available updates to your CMS?

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Security Optimizations: Take It to the Next Level

- Is your payment processor PCI Compliant?
- Do you follow PCI guidelines when you record or store donor information?

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Donation Page Optimization

In 2020, [M+R Benchmarks](#) found that around 80% of people who land on your donation page won't make a gift. But why is that? And how can you beat the odds?

There are a few reasons so many people will leave a donation page without giving. Some visitors, for example, may visit your donation page as part of their research before deciding to give. Others may have landed on your page accidentally. But some may be leaving because your donation form isn't compelling, doesn't seem safe, or is complicated or frustrating to use.

The key to improving your conversion rate is optimizing your donation page to mitigate those reasons. Let's take a look at how to do it.

» [Why Is Donation Page Optimization Important?](#)

» [Brand Your Donation Page](#)

» [How to Build an Optimized Donation Form](#)

» [Recap](#)

» [Activity](#)

Why Is Donation Page Optimization Important?

Let's be honest: No nonprofit will ever reach a 100% conversion rate on their donation forms. But taking the time to optimize your donation page can help you raise more money by giving your potential donors an enjoyable experience from the moment they land on your page to when they see the donation confirmation page.

In this final module of the Website Optimization Action Plan, we'll look at how to set up your donation page to increase the odds that someone makes a gift.

A quick note: While the best practices we'll cover here pertain to donation forms, many of them can be applied to other kinds of forms, too. Membership enrollment forms, storefronts, and even volunteer interest forms will benefit from following some or all of these tactics.
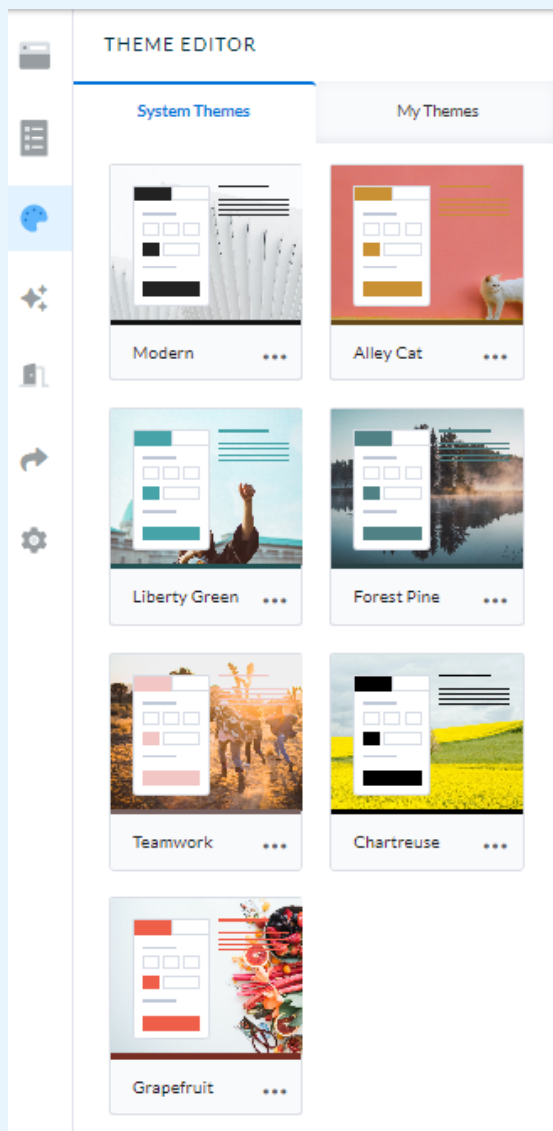
Brand Your Donation Page

Imagine you're going to donate to your neighborhood food pantry. When you click the "Donate" button in the site navigation, you land on a plain white page. Aside from a small logo at the top of the form, there's no imagery, no messaging, and nothing that makes that form feel like part of the rest of the site.

Now imagine that you click to donate and are taken to a page that looks and feels like the organization's website. The color scheme is the same, the page includes an image that ties back to the content on the homepage, and there's a short paragraph that reiterates how your donation will make a difference to the people in your community.

Which donation page will make you most likely to give?

The imagery, content, and branding on your page can either confirm someone's instinct to give or dissuade them from making a donation. Ensure your donation page's look and feel matches that of your website as a whole. Your background, color scheme, and logo placement should mimic the rest of your site; that will create a seamless experience for your potential supporters, not a jarring disruption to the thoughts and feelings that led them to that page in the first place.

Don't worry about designing the perfect donation form from scratch; if you're using Neon One's donation forms, you can choose one of our system templates or create your own theme.

After you've applied your organization's branding to your donation form, add some additional elements that will inspire people to give. Here are four steps you can take to make your donation page more appealing to potential supporters.

1. Add a Great Image to Your Donation Page

Donors give because they want to make a difference. If someone's landed on your donation page, they're there because something about your cause resonates with them. You can increase the likelihood that they donate by adding an image that reinforces their connection to your work.

Look for an image that helps donors visualize the tangible outcomes they'll make with their gift. The most effective images will generally include:

- One person or a small group of people (think 2-4 people)

- Subjects that are making eye contact with the camera

- A generally happy, hopeful, or uplifting feeling

There are always exceptions to these guidelines, of course! The key takeaway here is that images that intentionally tap into a visitor's emotions will be more effective than an image that's purely decorative or overly practical.

2. Use Thoughtful Copy to Engage Donors

Create content for the top of your page that reiterates someone's instinct to give. People who arrive at your donation form have probably seen a social media post about your work, landed there as they explored your site, or clicked on a link shared by a friend or family member. Regardless of how they got to your donation page, they'll be more likely to donate if they are reminded of the positive impact they will make with their support. Help donors understand their impact by sharing a little bit of information about how their donation will make a difference and what positive outcomes will be possible because of their generosity.

3. Eliminate Distractions

People are easily distracted, and those distractions can prevent someone from completing a gift. You can mitigate that risk by removing outbound links, conflicting calls to action, videos, and other elements from your site.

While it's important to have your donation page look and feel like the rest of your website, removing navigation items from the top of your donation page can help you improve conversion rates. Keep the color scheme, logo placement, fonts, and other elements consistent, but consider removing navigation items so people can focus on completing their gift. You should also review any copy, sidebars, and other content to make sure there are no conflicting calls to action on your page. It's always great to have someone sign up for your newsletter or check out your Amazon wishlist, but not when it distracts them from making a donation!
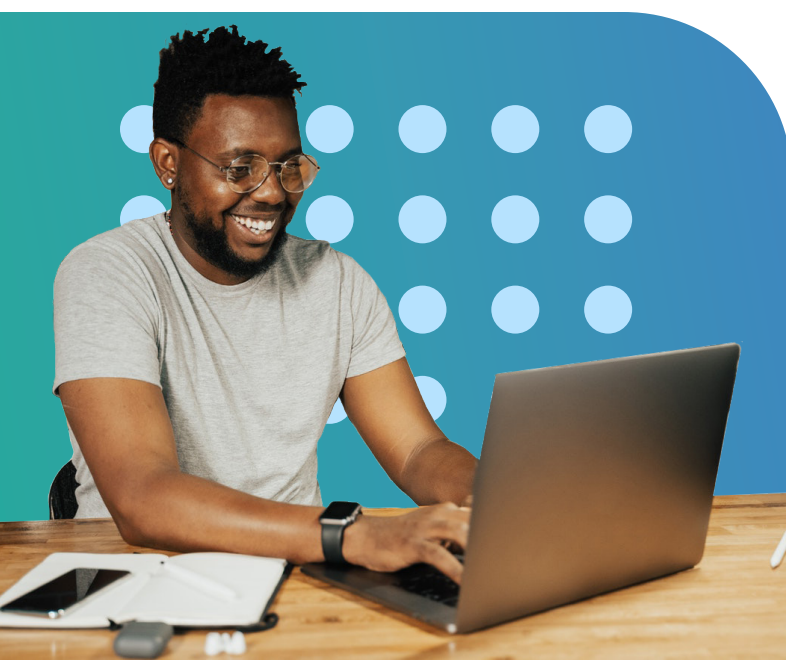
Once you've designed a compelling donation page, it's time to look at your donation form. The page itself has reinforced a donor's decision to give; now you just need a form that makes the giving process quick and easy.

How to Build an Optimized Donation Form

Peoples' short attention spans are an important consideration when designing your donation page, and they're important to consider while you're designing the form they'll fill out to make a gift. These simple steps will help you create a donation form that makes giving a positive experience, not a frustrating one.

Create Your Form

You'll need at least one multi-purpose donation form to connect to the "Donate" button on your website. If you're using a service like Neon CRM that allows you to create multiple donation forms, you're already in a great place! Create a year-round form that people will land on when they click

on your "Donate" button on your site. After that, you can spin up other forms for use in specific appeals, like appeals for a particular campaign, recurring gift appeals, and specific donor segments.

For now, though, let's focus on one form— your year-round donation form that will be easily accessible from every page on your website.

Use a Multi-Page Donation Form

Nobody loves filling out long forms, and that includes donors. A study by NextAfter found that visually shorter forms increase conversion rates by almost 40%. Splitting the donation form into smaller pieces doesn't make the form shorter, but it makes it feel shorter—and that's just as important.

There's another advantage to setting up a multi-page donation form, too; doing so makes it easier for people to donate from any page. You can create a branded donate button and add it to any page on your website. When someone clicks on that button, your donation form will appear in a pop-up that gives people the ability to give without navigating away from that page. Multi-page forms work better in these modals than one-page forms!

Your online fundraising platform should give you the option to create a multi-step donation form. The first step should ask donors to choose how much they want to donate, and the second and third steps should include providing their personal and payment information.

Include Suggested Donation Amounts

If it's supported by your online fundraising platform, take some time to add suggested donation amounts. This can help your donors choose how much they want to donate, and it can prevent decision fatigue by showing them options that can inform their decision. If someone doesn't know how much to give, simply seeing a range of options can help them choose a gift size that works for them.

Two tactics will help you make the most of your suggested donation amounts. The first is to choose a range of amounts that are reasonable for the majority of your donor base. If you notice that the average donation on your form is $20, for example, you wouldn't want to make the lowest suggested amount $50. Instead, try setting the lowest amount to $25.

The second tactic is to include an "Other" option where donors can choose to give their own amount. Suggested donation amounts can often inspire people to give slightly more than they intended—someone who meant to give $20 may choose to increase their gift to $25 if it's an option—but that's not always the case. Make sure that $20 donor can make that gift regardless of your suggestions.

Suggested donation amounts can be even more effective when they're tied to a specific outcome or impact. When you build your donation form, try adding 1-2 sentences around what each donation amount can achieve. For example, "$50 will help us provide school lunch for our classroom for a week." You'll remind donors how valuable

their support is and how their gift will help serve your community.

Neon One User Tip:
Multi-page forms feel shorter and less overwhelming for donors. But no two donor bases are the same; if your donors prefer longer forms that are all housed on a single page, you can choose the "One-page" page flow in the Neon CRM donation form builder.

Give Your Donors Options

Perhaps the trickiest part of optimizing your donation page is giving your donors a variety of options for giving without creating an overwhelming donation experience. That's why a streamlined design is so important. You want to be able to customize your form based on your programs, campaigns, and goals, but you don't want it to distract donors. Here are three options you'll want to consider adding to your form, plus some pointers on how to do it without affecting conversion rates.

Add Recurring Options
Every fundraiser loves recurring donors. This invaluable group—which are sometimes called "sustaining" donors—have better retention rates and higher donor lifetime value than one-time donors. If you want recurring donors, you need to have recurring options on your form.

When you set up your donation form, enable recurring donations and add a couple of billing options. Monthly donations are

probably the most common, but you may also want to add options to give weekly or annually. You can create an even better experience by using different suggested donation amounts for one-time and recurring gifts, if it's appropriate for your donor base.

Allow Donors to Cover Fees
Donors are motivated by the understanding that their gift will help advance a particular cause, and they're often very invested in making as big an impact as possible. Giving them the option to offset processing fees associated with their donation means giving them the opportunity to have more of their original donation amount go toward your work.

Your online fundraising platform should give you this option, and donors can usually opt into paying extra by checking a box near the end of the donation process. Make sure it's not checked by default! Defaulting to having your donors cover your fees may seem like a good way to raise more money at first, but doing so can leave a bad taste in donors' mouths. If a donor wants to go above and beyond by covering those fees, that's wonderful! But donors should never feel coerced or guilted into paying extra. It's important that this remains an option, not an obligation.

Diversify Your Payment Options
One reason donors abandon the donation process is that they've encountered friction. "Friction" here refers to anything that disrupts the flow of the transaction process, and it can include anything from not understanding what information they need

to provide to encountering broken buttons or glitches. One big source of friction you can eliminate stems from the payment options available to them.

Offering multiple options will help ensure that everyone who wants to donate to your cause can do so using their preferred payment method. If you can, give donors the ability to donate by:

- Credit or debit card

- Mobile payment options (Google Pay, Apple Pay)

- eCheck/ACH

- PayPal

Your potential donors will be most likely to finish their gift when they can pay quickly and easily. Giving them multiple options will make that possible.

**IF YOU WANT RECURRING DONORS, YOU NEED TO HAVE RECURRING OPTIONS ON YOUR FORM.**
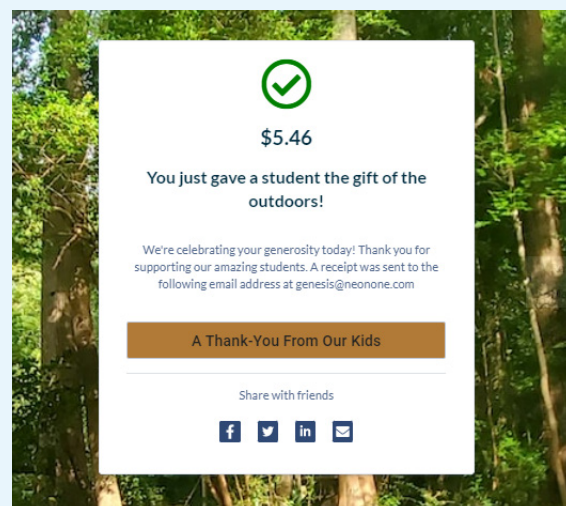
Don't Forget Your Confirmation Page

Your relationship with a donor doesn't end when they complete their transaction. That's really when it begins! Taking the time to customize your donation confirmation page will help make a great impression on your donors, make them feel good about supporting your cause, and set the stage for future interactions.

When your donors land on your donation form's confirmation page, they're experiencing the warm fuzzy feelings associated with doing something great to support a cause that's important to them. Making the most of your confirmation page is a powerful way to turn a simple donation transaction into a magical generosity experience that they'll remember for a long time.

As you customize your donation form, add some high-impact elements to the confirmation page. Add a "thank you" image and some copy that celebrates their kindness and generosity. Alternatively, you could make an even bigger impression by replacing the thank-you image with a heartwarming video that gives donors insight into what their gift will achieve.

Use your confirmation page to give your donors a next step. You could ask them to watch your video, follow you on social media, read an important article or impact story, or share your organization with their friends and family—the possibilities are endless. Make sure you replace the site navigation here so people can continue browsing your site.

When you have a thoughtfully designed donation confirmation page, you're well on your way to building a great relationship with both new and returning donors. Combine it with a great receipt, personalized communications (like a welcome series for new donors or regular impact updates), and other donor retention tactics to create a generosity experience they'll never forget.

Neon One Quick Tip

As you build your forms in Neon CRM, make sure you visit the "Exit Page" tab of the form builder. From there, you can easily update the title, add a heartfelt thank-you message, add buttons that direct donors to different pages on your site, or include links to your social media profiles.

LET'S RECAP

You've optimized your website. Now it's time to optimize your donation form. Here are a few key takeaways that will help:

1. 80% of people who land on your donation page won't make a gift. While that number will never be 0, creating a great donation page will help improve your conversion rates.

2. Branding your donation form by using your organization's branding, including storytelling elements, adding impact statements, and limiting conflicting calls to action, will help people focus on the task at hand—making a gift.

3. Instead of creating a one-step form where all fields are visible at once, set up a multi-step form. It won't technically be shorter than a one-step process, but it will feel shorter, and that's what really matters.

4. Include suggested donation amounts that help donors decide how much they want to give.

5. Give your donors options! Enable recurring gifts on your form, give supporters the opportunity to cover processing fees, and try to offer the most popular payment methods. You might not use Google Pay or PayPal yourself, but your donors might. They'll be more likely to give if they can do so using their preferred method.

You've Finished Week 7! Now What?

Congratulations! You've finished all seven weeks of our Website Optimization Action plan. Now what?

Here are some activities to get you started.

If You're Looking for More Ways to Engage Your Supporters
Try checking out The Donor Retention Checklist, which features a month-by-month timeline for donor communications. If you're interested in refreshing your donation receipts and thank-you letters, you'll like our Nonprofit Receipt & Thank-You Letter Templates: They include receipt templates for five different kinds of nonprofit transactions, plus one for a standalone thank-you letter.
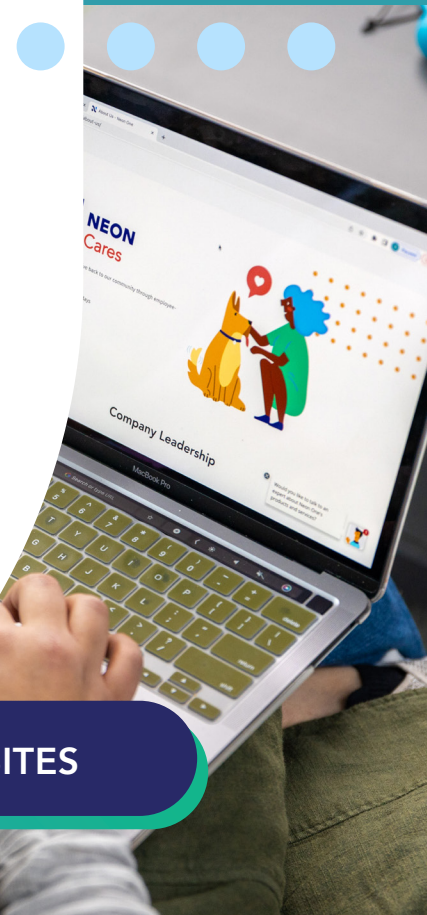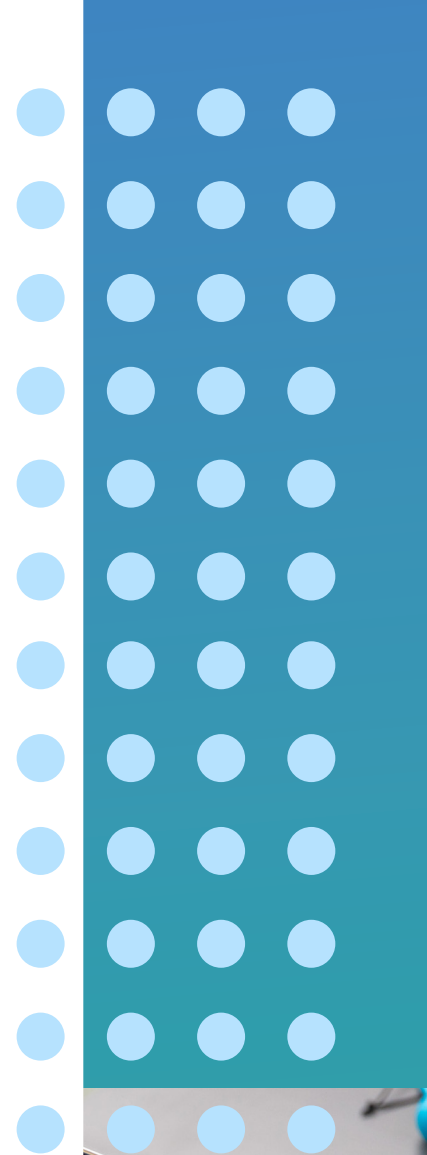
If You're Looking for a Way to Manage Donors and Other Constituents
A great CRM can help you track your fundraising progress, manage donors, and build a community of lifelong supporters. If you're looking for a CRM for your own organization, you might be interested in The Buyer's Guide to Choosing a Nonprofit CRM. We even have a quiz to help you find a few CRM vendors that will fit your needs. Not ready for a fully featured CRM? Try downloading these Donor Database Templates for Excel and Google Sheets.

Use a Website Design Platform Made Specifically for Nonprofits

Neon Websites includes all the tools you need to create, design, and personalize a website for your nonprofit—no coding necessary. And, since it connects seamlessly with Neon CRM, it's easy for you to customize your donation page, connect it to your site, and create a generosity experience that will deepen supporters' relationship with you and your work.

LEARN MORE ABOUT NEON WEBSITES

Donating makes donors feel good. It should, anyway. But a poorly formatted donation page can turn away even the most enthusiastic donor. Use this checklist to put together a page that will turn a donation transaction into a generosity experience your supporter will remember for a long, long time.

☐ Our donation form has the same look and feel as the rest of our site

☐ Our donation form includes a high-impact image that will help connect potential donors to the people we serve

    ☐ Bonus: The image features an individual or small group the donors can easily connect with

    ☐ Bonus: The image generally feels happy, uplifting, hopeful, or otherwise positive

☐ Our donation form includes copy that reiterates someone's decision to give

☐ Our donation form includes nothing that could be distracting to someone as they make a gift, including external links, navigation items, and conflicting calls to action

☐ The form on our donation page is split into multiple steps that makes the process feel shorter and easier

☐ Donors see a list of suggested donation amounts on the form

☐ The donation form includes recurring giving options

    ☐ Bonus: We included more than one billing option for recurring donors

    ☐ Bonus: The suggested gift amounts for recurring gifts are appropriately sized

☐ The form gives donors the opportunity to offset processing costs

    ☐ Bonus: This option is not selected by default

☐ Donors have the option of using the most common preferred payment methods:
    ☐ Credit or debit card
    ☐ eCheck/ACH
    ☐ Google Pay
    ☐ Apple Pay
    ☐ PayPal
    ☐ Other:_____
    ☐ Other:_____

☐ Our confirmation page includes a happy image or uplifting video that makes donors feel good about their decision to give

☐ Our confirmation page includes copy that thanks donors for their generosity and includes a next step

About Neon One

Neon One provides social good organizations with connected fundraising tools and services they need to help fulfill their mission. We work hard to help nonprofits raise more money and build sustainable, long-term growth with software, services, and resources. Our products are designed to manage the full range of your nonprofit's operational needs, from fundraising and donor management to program operations and financial reconciliation. Visit neonone.com to learn more about Neon Websites, Neon CRM, and all the other tools in our platform.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PRODUCTS