betterworld

How to increase nonprofit donations online: A full-funnel playbook.

Online giving has grown 99% since 2021, while offline revenue grew just 36% over the same period. That gap is only widening. Yet most nonprofits are still treating their online fundraising as a secondary channel, patching up a donation form here, sending an email blast there, and wondering why results stay flat.

The problem is rarely effort. It's diagnosis. When you don't know which part of your funnel is leaking, every fix feels like a guess.

This guide is built for development and fundraising managers who want a clear picture of the full donor journey, from the first website visit to a sustained monthly gift. Each section includes real benchmarks so you can measure where you stand and prioritize what to fix.

THE CORE INSIGHT

Only 1.6% of nonprofit website visitors become donors, according to M+R Benchmarks 2026. That means 98.4% of the people who already care enough to visit your site leave without giving. Closing that gap, not driving more traffic, is where the highest-leverage work lives.

Here's what this playbook covers:

- **Donation page conversion** – why most pages underperform and what to change
- **Mobile giving** – designing for the channel where most donors now browse
- **Recurring giving** – the economics that make monthly donors your most valuable segment
- **Email, social, and matching gifts** – the acquisition layer that fills the top of the funnel
- **Retention** – how to keep donors engaged long enough to become lifetime supporters

Fix your donation page first.

The donation page is where intent turns into revenue, or doesn't. It's also where most nonprofits lose the most ground without realizing it.

The average donation page converts at around 11% on desktop and 8% on mobile. Well-optimized pages hit 17% to 22%. That spread is not a small difference: if your page receives 1,000 visits a month, the gap between 8% and 17% conversion is 90 additional donors every month, before you spend a dollar on acquisition.

Virtuous puts it plainly: pages below a 17% conversion rate likely need optimization. Most pages fall short of that threshold for the same handful of reasons.

The most common conversion killers

- **Too many form fields**
  Every additional field reduces completion rates. Ask for name, email, and payment. Save everything else for the thank-you sequence.
- **No suggested gift amounts**
  Donors anchor to whatever number they see first. A page with no suggested amounts consistently underperforms one with three or four concrete options.
- **Weak or missing trust signals**
  A security badge, a 501(c)(3) confirmation, and a one-line statement about how funds are used can meaningfully lift conversion, especially for first-time donors.
- **A 68% cart abandonment rate**
  According to Gitnux, more than two-thirds of donors who start the giving process don't finish it. The most common reasons: friction in the form, payment method limitations, and last-minute doubt about impact.

What high-converting pages do differently

The best-performing donation pages share a few structural traits:

- **Single-purpose layout**
  No navigation links, no sidebar content, no distractions. The only action available is to give.
- **Impact framing on the page itself**
  Not just "donate now," but "$50 feeds a family for a week." Specificity converts.
- **Monthly giving as a visible default**
  More on this in the recurring giving section, but the placement of the monthly toggle matters enormously.
- **Fee coverage prompt**
  About 55% of donors will cover processing fees when asked. A simple opt-in checkbox recovers meaningful revenue at zero cost.

If you haven't reviewed your donation page conversion rate recently, that's the first number to find.

Treat mobile as your primary channel.

Most nonprofits design for desktop and adapt for mobile. That approach is now backwards.

Over 70% of Gen Z donors prefer mobile giving, and that cohort is becoming a larger share of your donor base every year. More broadly, mobile now accounts for the majority of nonprofit website traffic. If your donation page loads slowly, requires pinching to zoom, or forces donors to type out a 16-digit card number on a small screen, you are losing gifts that were already in motion.

The mobile giving gap

The data makes the problem concrete. Desktop donation pages convert at around 11%. Mobile pages convert at around 8%. That three-point gap represents a significant revenue loss for any organization with meaningful mobile traffic, and most have more than they realize.

Two factors drive most of that gap:

- **Page speed**
  Slow load times are the single biggest driver of mobile abandonment. Use Google PageSpeed Insights to benchmark your current performance. A page that takes more than three seconds to load will lose a measurable percentage of donors before the form even appears.
- **Payment friction**
  Entering card details on a phone is cumbersome enough that many donors simply stop. Digital wallets (Apple Pay, Google Pay, PayPal) now account for roughly 60% of mobile donations, according to RKD Group. If your platform doesn't support them, you're asking donors to do more work than they expect.

What mobile-first design actually means

"Nonprofits must treat mobile as the primary experience, not just a resized version of desktop." — Nonprofit Pro

In practice, mobile-first means:

- Large tap targets for buttons and gift amount selections
- A form that requires minimal typing (autofill-compatible fields, wallet payment options)
- A single-column layout that doesn't require horizontal scrolling
- A confirmation screen that loads quickly and feels complete

Run your donation page through [Google's Mobile-Friendly Test] as a baseline. Then go further: complete a test donation on your own phone and note every point of friction. That experience is exactly what your donors encounter.

Make recurring giving the default, not the upsell.

Recurring giving is the most underleveraged strategy in online fundraising. The economics are straightforward: a donor who gives $25 once is worth $25. A donor who gives $25 a month is worth $300 a year, and about 50% of monthly donors make additional one-time gifts on top of their recurring commitment, according to Giving USA.

Monthly giving now accounts for 31% of all online revenue and grew 11% in 2026, while one-time online giving declined 12% over the same period. The organizations building durable fundraising programs are the ones shifting their donor base toward recurring commitments.

The default option problem

Here's the issue most nonprofits have: 64% of them still default their donation forms to one-time gifts, according to M+R Benchmarks. That means the majority of donors who would have been happy to give monthly never see it as the obvious choice.

The fix is simple but counterintuitive. Make monthly giving the pre-selected option. Don't hide it in a tab or present it as an upgrade. Present it as the standard way to give, with one-time giving as the alternative.

The revenue math is compelling: If your average one-time gift is $75 and your average monthly gift is $24, a donor who gives monthly for just four months has already exceeded the value of a one-time gift, and they're still giving.

Building a monthly giving program that retains donors

Acquiring a monthly donor is only half the work. Retention is where the program either compounds or collapses. Roughly 35% of failed recurring gifts happen due to expired cards, costing the sector an estimated $500 million annually in lost revenue.

A sustainable monthly giving program requires:

Element	Why it matters
Automatic card updater	Reduces failed payments from expired cards without requiring donor action
Impact reporting	Monthly donors who receive proof of impact renew at significantly higher rates
Annual upgrade ask	A single email asking monthly donors to increase their gift by $5 converts at a surprisingly high rate
Lapsed donor reactivation	Donors whose cards fail should receive a prompt reactivation sequence, not silence

Platforms like BetterWorld make it straightforward to set up recurring giving with no platform fees, so 100% of each monthly gift reaches the organization.

Email, peer-to-peer, and matching gifts: Fill the top of the funnel.

Optimizing your donation page matters only if people are arriving at it. The acquisition layer, the channels that drive traffic and warm up prospective donors, is where many nonprofits have the most untapped potential.

Email: Still the highest-ROI channel

Fundraising emails achieve open rates of 24% to 28%, well above the average for most industries. The challenge isn't getting donors to open emails; it's getting them to click through and complete a gift. A few principles that consistently improve results:

- **Segment by giving history**
  A lapsed donor and a first-time prospect should not receive the same message. Personalized appeals based on past behavior outperform generic blasts.
- **Lead with impact, not need**
  Donors respond to evidence of what their gift accomplishes, not just descriptions of organizational challenges. "Your $40 provided clean water for a child for a year" outperforms "We need your support to continue our work."
- **Send more than you think you should**
  Most nonprofits under-email their lists. Donors who opted in expect to hear from you. A monthly impact update, a campaign-specific ask, and a year-end appeal are a floor, not a ceiling.

Peer-to-peer: Turning Donors into fundraisers

Peer-to-peer fundraising extends your reach to audiences you can't access directly. When a supporter creates a personal fundraising page and shares it with their network, they bring in donors who have no prior relationship with your organization but have a strong relationship with the person asking.

The key to a successful peer-to-peer program is removing friction for the fundraiser: provide pre-written social copy, a simple page setup process, and real-time progress updates that keep fundraisers motivated.

Matching gifts: The most underused revenue source

An estimated $4 to $7 billion in matching gift funds goes unclaimed every year, according to Double the Donation. Most donors don't know their employer offers a match, and most nonprofits don't ask.

A matching gift prompt on your donation confirmation page, in your thank-you email, and in your year-end appeal is one of the simplest revenue multipliers available. Some organizations have doubled the effective value of a campaign simply by surfacing the match opportunity at the right moment.

The bottom line on acquisition: More traffic is not the answer if your page doesn't convert. But once your conversion rate is healthy, email, peer-to-peer, and matching gifts are the three channels most likely to move the needle without requiring a large paid media budget.

Retention: Where the revenue compounds.

Acquiring a new donor costs significantly more than retaining an existing one. Yet most nonprofits invest far more in acquisition than in the post-gift experience that determines whether a donor gives again.

The donors most likely to give again are the ones who felt their first gift mattered. That feeling doesn't happen automatically. It has to be engineered into the donor journey.

The post-gift sequence that drives retention

The 48 hours after a donation are the highest-leverage window in the donor relationship. What happens in that window shapes whether the donor becomes a repeat giver or a one-time transaction.

A strong post-gift sequence includes:

- An immediate, specific thank-you
  Not a generic receipt, but a message that names what the gift will accomplish. "Your $50 gift today will cover school supplies for two students this fall" is more effective than "Thank you for your generous donation."
- A 30-day impact update
  A brief message showing early evidence of the gift at work. A photo, a single stat, or a one-paragraph story is enough.
- A 90-day re-engagement
  For one-time donors, this is the window to introduce the monthly giving option. Frame it as an easy way to extend the impact they've already started.

Transparency as a retention strategy

Next-generation donors, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, respond to metrics, outcomes, and transparency rather than emotional appeals alone. They want to know how funds are allocated, what outcomes were achieved, and how the organization measures its own effectiveness.

An annual impact report, even a simple one-page digital version, signals that your organization takes accountability seriously. Donors who receive proof of impact renew their commitments at meaningfully higher rates than those who don't.

"Next-gen donors want metrics, outcomes, and transparency, not just emotional appeals." — DonorPerfect, 2026 Trends Webinar

The organizations that treat retention as a discipline, not an afterthought, are the ones that build donor bases that compound over time. Each retained donor reduces the acquisition burden for the following year.

Start with the audit, not the campaign

The most common mistake in online fundraising is launching a new campaign before understanding why the last one underperformed. More traffic sent to a broken donation page produces more abandoned gifts. A peer-to-peer program built on top of a weak retention system acquires donors who don't come back.

The sequence matters. Fix conversion first. Build recurring giving infrastructure. Then scale acquisition.

A practical starting point: Pull your current donation page conversion rate. Compare it to the 11% desktop and 8% mobile benchmarks from M+R. If you're below those numbers, that's where the work begins. If you're above them, the next constraint is likely in your retention sequence or your recurring giving default settings.

BetterWorld is a free platform built specifically for nonprofits that want to run this entire funnel, from donation pages and peer-to-peer campaigns to recurring giving and auctions, without platform fees. If you're evaluating your current tools, it's worth a look.
The organizations that consistently grow their online fundraising aren't the ones running the most campaigns. They're the ones who understand their funnel well enough to know exactly where to push.

Ready to simplify your fundraising?

BetterWorld is free to use, covers 12 fundraising tools in one platform, and charges no platform fee. You can launch your first campaign in minutes. Start your free BetterWorld account and see how much easier fundraising can be when everything lives in one place.