

THE NONPROFIT'S GUIDE TO INCREASE ONLINE DONATIONS



ELEVATION

www.elevationweb.org

INTRODUCTION

Fundraising – it's an **ever-present challenge** for most nonprofits. Whether you're focusing on specific events-based or campaign fundraising or accepting general donations, fundraising plays a crucial role in your organization by keeping your organization afloat, allowing you to expand your mission to include new audiences and programs, purchasing new equipment and updating technology, and even maintaining your daily operations, hard-working staff and offices.

Your development strategy probably seeks to increase donations and fundraising efforts through **various channels**. Some types of donations acceptance most commonly used by nonprofits are:

- ▶ **Traditional:** mail campaigns, fundraising events,
- ▶ **Online:** donations via form submission, processed through 3rd party, can be linked to email campaign,
- ▶ **Crowdfunding:** via 3rd party platform that harnesses target audience's fundraising efforts and belief in a cause (directly-related or parallel to your mission) to raise funds for specific event/person/equipment.

Importance of online donations

More than just a supplement to your regular donations acceptance, online donations can be **a safe and regular way** to conduct fundraising campaigns. Donating online is not just an option for your “tech-savvy” audience—**smart design and simplicity** are the key to donor conversion online.

What can online donations do for you?

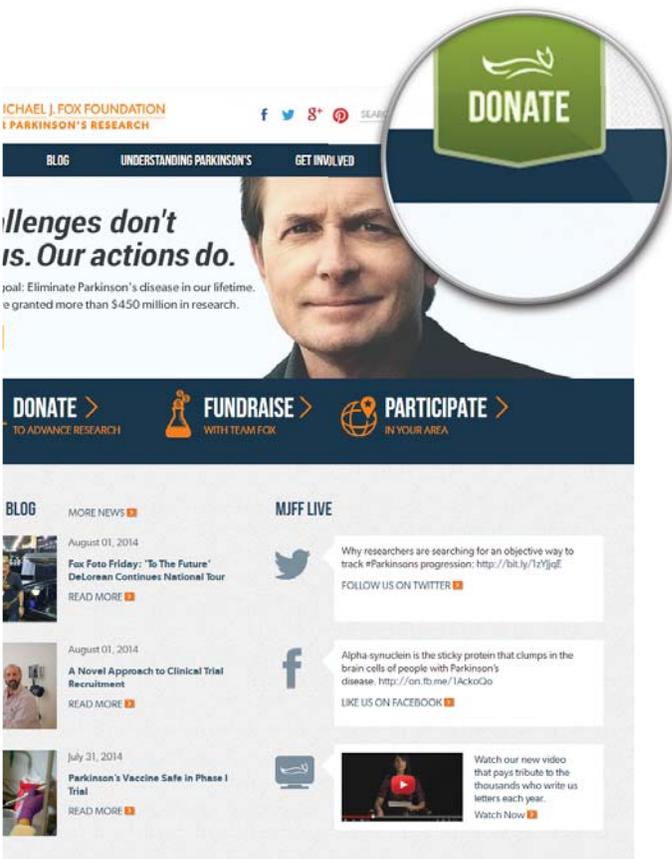
- ▶ Encourage existing donors to recruit **potential donors** through the website,
- ▶ Website and email communication are an easy way to “**give back**” to donors and encourage repeat donations by sharing unique content such as photos, event summaries, or physical products/gifts,
- ▶ Email/website fundraising campaigns can be targeted for **seasonal** donations (highest donations amounts on average received in December),
- ▶ **Crowdfunding-type donations** are higher on average than regular donations,
- ▶ Online giving may be more convenient for potential donors than coming into the office or sending a check; importance of **offline motivation** to convert online donors.

Understanding online donors:

A surprising fact about online donor demographics is that the average donor is in their 40s, and older donors tend to donate more. Older online donors need more offline motivators to convert them to give online. Some of the biggest motivators for online giving are offline **conversations** or receipt of **mail campaigns** as well as something they've seen on the website itself. Because volunteers usually make up the core of your online donor-base, it's important to make volunteer-related areas of your website easy-to-use, as well as **target volunteers** with email fundraising campaigns.

Your organization's website functions as an advertisement for your services, and visitors will judge your organization by the site's ease-of-use, interactiveness, and regular content updates. When analyzing your online donations, correct placement and page layout are important factors in converting new site visitors as well as repeat donors.

7 ways to improve your online donations



Source: The Michael J. Fox Foundation
www.michaeljfox.org

1. The Donate Button

Whether it's a button that donors click on to complete their donation with a 3rd party in a new tab, or the button used to direct them from your homepage to the donations form, the design and placement of this button is crucial to keeping repeat donors from getting frustrated and catching new donors attention while on your site.

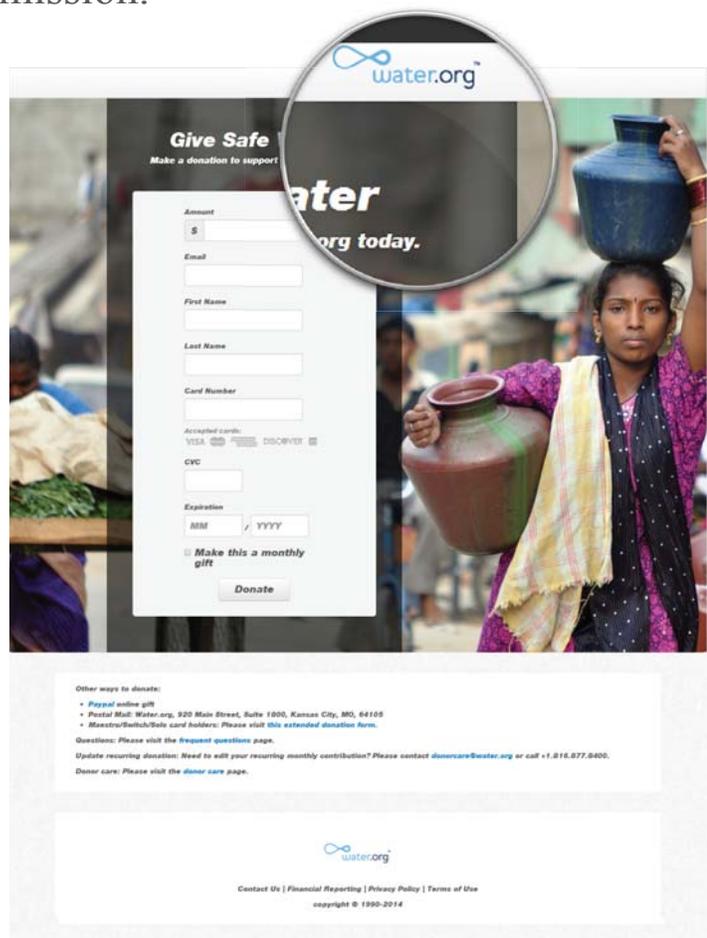
Color-contrast, obvious locations, and clean design are all key elements for the donate button when considering how to target online donors.

Depending on your organization's marketing strategy, you should consider keeping the donate button **"above the fold"** on the homepage so that it is visible as soon as you open the site.

Incorporating the donate button into the layout of “interior” pages helps **create an easier conversion process** for site visitors, instead of looking for the “giving” or “support” section in your menu. Placing it at the top of a side-menu at the same level as the heading of that page’s content keeps it within the view of the reader when they first land on that page.

While 3rd party processors such as PayPal offer their own donate button to insert into your site, designing a graphic that reflects the branding of your organization **reinforces donor confidence** and the correlation between their monetary gift and your organization’s mission.

Associating your branding with your donations process is a strategic tactic that all organizations should employ. Investing in a header with your organization’s logo and color scheme is a smart step. This can later be applied as a “skin” to a page where the donor is redirected to a 3rd party donations form. Or, if donations are processed in-site, creating a donations form with field backgrounds and buttons whose colors match your **organizations logo and branding** helps reinforce the emotional association with your non-profit.



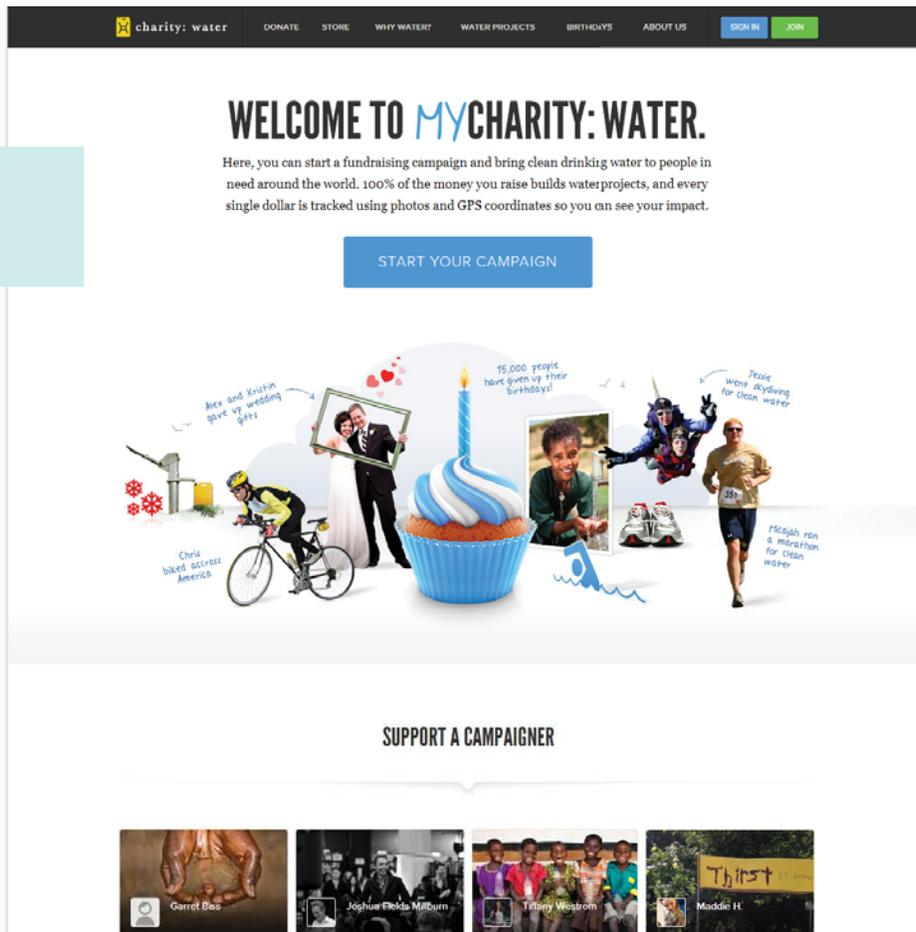
Source: Water
www.water.org

2. As Easy as 1, 2, 3...

Creating a custom layout design for your donations page can increase user satisfaction with the check-out process for submitting their donation. **Reducing the number of steps** required to go from the donate button to the “Thank You” receipt message helps to capture new donors. In previous studies, it was shown that tweaks to the layout and field-grouping improved donor conversion. A **horizontal layout** that illustrates the donation process can be just enough of a change from the typical vertical form that it captures donor interest.

Using graphics and animated effects can reduce scrolling to complete the form, and can also reduce the appearance of the number of steps required to submit payment.

Including a photo above the form that appeals to your donors ‘ emotional side has been shown to increase donor conversion.



Source:Charity Water
my.charitywater.org

Consider how the donations form can work for you: what information do you absolutely need and what can be considered superfluous to reduce the number of fields required?

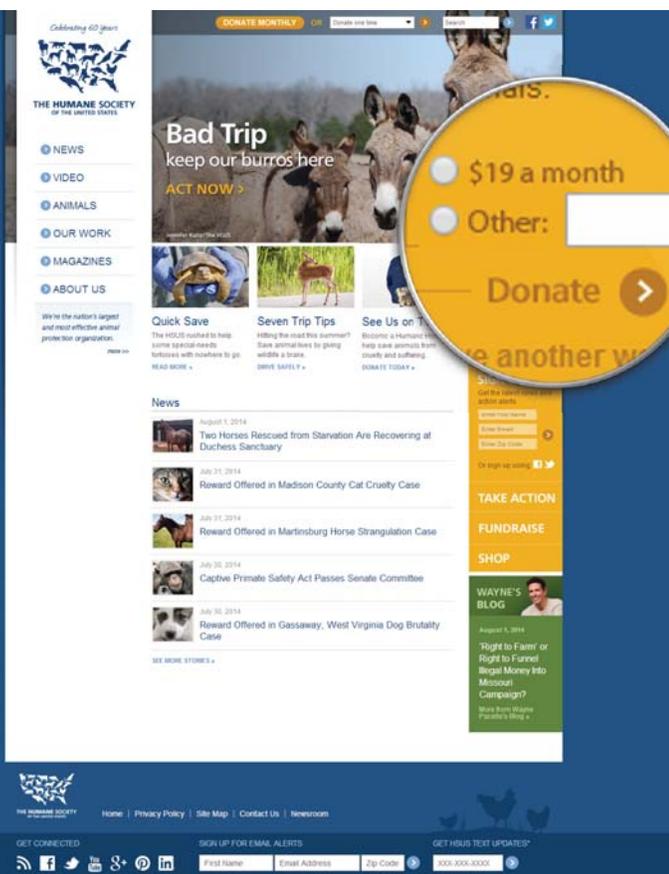
Including radio buttons in your form with the options to donate **set amounts** or donate on a **recurring basis** offer suggestive persuasion to the online donor. It has been shown that online donors prefer to donate in increments of \$25: \$25, \$50, and \$100.

The image shows a screenshot of the Livestrong.org donation form. A circular callout highlights the donation amount options: \$25 (highlighted in yellow) and \$50. Below these are options for \$100, \$500, \$1000, and Other. The form also includes a checkbox for "Make this donation in honor or memory of someone?" and a "Donate Now" button. Below the form, there is a testimonial section with a photo of a woman and text: "Your gift will change lives. Cancer happens to a person, not a number. Each person has her journey, his experience, her feelings, his attitude. Facing that journey is precisely why we have developed programs to help the whole person heal and to help communities support people affected by cancer." Below this is a section titled "One-on-One Cancer Support" with a photo of a woman and text: "Cancer presents everyday challenges for survivors and their families. That's why we offer solutions like emotional support, fertility preservation, clinical trial matching, guidance on treatment options and insurance and financial assistance—all free of charge." At the bottom, there is a section titled "Help us provide life-changing services." with a donut chart showing 2012 revenue of \$44,796,203. The chart is divided into three categories: Functional Expenses (6 mill.), Programs (184,000), and Fundraising (17%). To the right of the chart, there are three bullet points: "We saved our 18,000 clients nearly \$8,000,000 in personal costs by negotiating discounts, maximizing available medication programs and overturning denials from insurance companies." "We invested \$1.4 million to bring proven cancer support programs to 90 sites across the U.S." "We helped more than 184,000 students and teachers in 2012 through our LIVESTRONG at School curriculum." The footer contains copyright information for Livestrong, the Livestrong Foundation logo, and several partner logos.

Source: Livestrong
www.livestrong.org/donation/

3. Repeat Users

Including the option of recurring donations automates some of the activity that an offline donor would typically do, submitting donations via check several times a year perhaps. Recurring donations, whether sent via the mail or online, allow you to **predict and track** total fundraising efforts on a regular basis. Setting up recurring donations with your donations form also ensures that that first-time donor on your website doesn't fail to donate again. If your organization uses a donate button provided by a 3rd party processor, such as PayPal, you can also customize this button to accept recurring donations. So no matter how your online donations are arranged, you won't be missing out on automated payments.



Making the connection from the donations page to your email communications and back again is an important step in fostering repeat donors. **Try including an email or newsletter sign-up next to your donations form** to reinforce donors' connection with their donation and the rewarding stories they will receive informing them of what you're able to accomplish with that money.

Source: Humane Society
www.humanesociety.org

Recurring donations are more likely when associated with **specific campaigns** related to sustaining your organization's operations or contributing to the well-being of recipients of your services. For example, sponsoring a child with school supplies is an ongoing cause that elicits an ongoing call to action from your donors.

Rewarding your donors with a profile of this child or photos from their school program will increase their those "feel-good" emotions associated every time they donate. The key is in **targeting the very next email communication** you send to these donors so that it is directly related to their recent donation. While sometimes it may take awhile to see the full impact of their donation, setting-up email blasts with a robust CRM software should allow for automated "reward" messages that can be sent over time to show how that \$25 or \$100 donation has helped your organization and its audience during the past week or even past 6 months.

4. Events-Based Donations

Everyone knows that deadlines spur action- and the same goes for your online donors. Give them an event to center their fundraising efforts around and you are more likely to see the donations rush in. Social fundraising events with ticket sales are also a way to **harness the connections of your event-goers** and grow your pool of potential donors.

Hosting **well-documented events** is also a strategy to reward donors with proof of what their donations have made possible. Invest in a good photographer to document these events and share these photos with your donors via targeted email blasts.

A rising trend in events-based donations is getting your target audience excited about **starting their own fundraising campaigns**: for example, sponsoring a runner for a marathon with proceeds going to your nonprofit. Using 3rd party applications and social media to build hype for these campaigns can bring in more donations and increase awareness about your events.

5. “Crowdraising”

Crowdfunding has already arrived as a financial means of attracting funding for a project by means of the “crowd” or mass audience, rather than traditional investors. Combine crowdfunding with fundraising and you get the term “crowdraising”, which applies the same concept to charitable fundraising. Sites like Fundraise.com, Betterplace, CauseVox, Fundly, Razoo, and Crowdrise all offer the ability to **create fundraising campaigns which can receive donations from individual users**. Inspired by original crowdfunding sites such as Indiegogo and Kickstarter, each of these options offers different benefits and transaction fees for nonprofits.

The screenshot shows the Razoo website interface. At the top, there's a search bar with the text "Find your cause" and a search icon. To the right, there are links for "Sign up using Facebook", "Sign up", and "Log in".

The main content area features a large green banner with the text "Be a hero for the causes you care about". Below this, there's a form to create a fundraiser. The "Cause" field is pre-filled with "Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin" and "The organization you are fundraising for". The "Fundraiser name" field is empty, with the prompt "What you are calling your fundraiser" below it. A green "START FUNDRAISING" button is at the bottom of the form.

On the right side, there are two call-to-action boxes: "What if others want to fundraise with me?" with a "SET UP A TEAM" button, and "What if I work for a nonprofit?" with a "NONPROFITS, START HERE" button.

Below the main form, there's a navigation menu with four categories: "START HERE", "EXPLORE", "RESOURCES", and "STAY IN TOUCH".

At the bottom right, there's a fundraising progress bar for "NOAH'S ARK ANIMAL SANCTUARY". It shows "AMOUNT RAISED: \$51,130" and a progress bar that is 68% full. Below the bar, it says "68% Raised of \$75,000 Goal".

The footer contains links for "About", "Blog", "Support", "Terms of Use", and "Privacy", along with social media icons and the copyright notice "© 2014 Razoo".

Source: Razoo
www.razoo.com

Source: Crowdrise
www.crowdrise.com

6. Keeping your Donors Safe

While online donations has been a growing resource for nonprofits, and technology has developed to facilitate accepting donations through your website, donor safety still remains an important concern. One of the main factors holding back a certain group of donors is the **perception** that donating their money online isn't as secure as sending a check in the mail. While this aversion to online payments may simply be a personal preference, there are some things you can do to “beef-up” security on your donations page.

- ▶ Purchase an **SSL certificate**: a secure socket layer, or “SSL” certificate protects site transactions such as online donations. Donors know that they're accessing a secured channel when they see the padlock icon in their browser, right next to your organization's web address. An extended validation SSL certificate will also display a green bar next to the padlock, and offers the highest level of encryption based on a global standard, perfect for organizations with an international donor-base.
- ▶ Open-source content management: choosing a non-proprietary platform for your website (one that is constantly being updated by developers world-wide) offers security in the sheer number of programmers working on **security upgrades on a regular basis** (as often as every year). For example, Drupal is used even by the White House due to its strong integrity against hacking attempts.
- ▶ Purchase an additional security package from your host or webmaster: your hosting provider may offer a plan that covers **regular site back-ups, site restoration, and scans for suspicious activity**. While you may not consider your organization's site a target for hackers, hacking attempts or loss of database information can affect anyone without the proper security precautions.

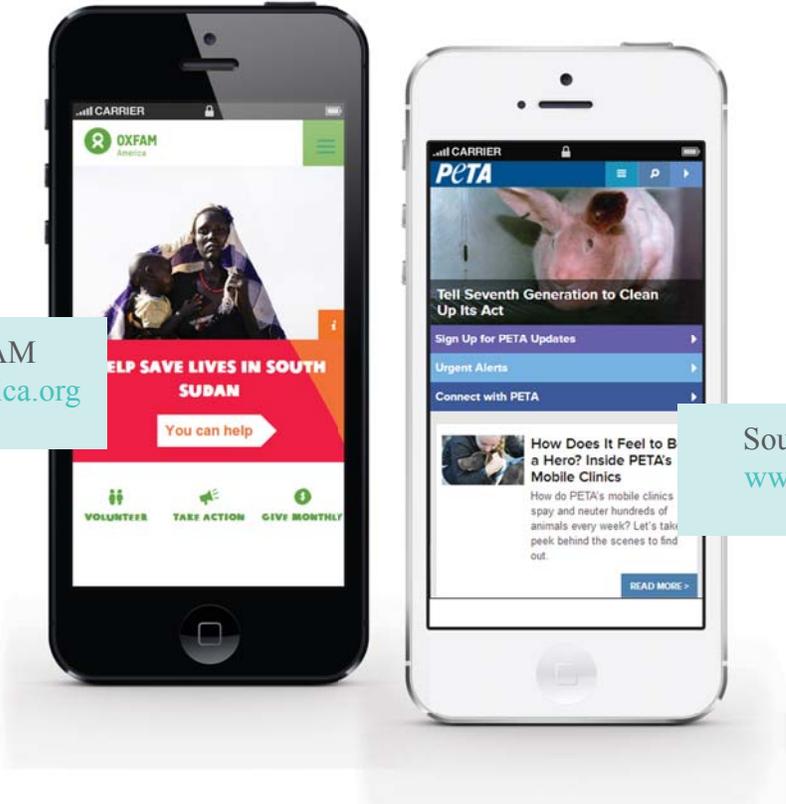
- ▶ **CAPTCHA:** to stop robots and spammers from posting on your forum or submitting advertising in your online forms. Adding a “**captcha**” to your online forms requires the user to reproduce a graphic image or word that is difficult to recognize by a robot.
- ▶ **Choosing your donations processor:** Donations processors such as PayPal, Authorize.net, Network for Good (among others) each have their own **connotation and reputation for security**. Some donors may associate PayPal, for example, with more commercial transactions, and view donations forms or buttons powered by PayPal as a less desirable way to give to your organization. Some organizations may also choose to give donors the option to select between two different processors in order to increase their level of comfort and trust.
- ▶ **Branding your donations page:** finally, another way to **increase the perceived security of donations** on your site is to brand your donations page. There is a high likelihood that site visitors that reach this page are more likely to donate if they see that your organization’s name and mission are represented alongside your request for donations. When using a template provided by a 3rd party processor or CRM service, it’s valuable to add a “skin” with the logo and color scheme of your nonprofit.
- ▶ **Secured seals:** Displaying symbols of secured seals such as Norton VeriSign, or GeoTrust at the top of your donations page assures your donors that their donation is protected by security standards backed by tech giants. Finding the right layout to include these seals along with your organization’s branding is a balance to be achieved by each organization.

7. On-the-Go

These days, the internet is a constant presence in our lives. Social media and email follow you wherever you go, always available on our mobile devices. Inserting your nonprofit's mission into your audience's daily routine is essential to marketing your organization and receiving donations.

Having a mobile-friendly website is almost a requirement, as Americans are spending more time than ever on their mobile devices- almost 2 ½ hours per day. To convert site visitors on their cellphones, it's important to design your donations page to be “**responsive**” to the screen size of standard phones and tablets.

Responsive web design adapts your page layout, menus, photos, and page content to fit the screen resolution of different devices on the market. Even if your donations form has been perfected for viewing on desktops and laptops, it may not be effective at capturing donations on-the-go.



Source: OXFAM
www.oxfamamerica.org

Source: PETA
www.peta.org

An important consideration that ties online donations to website security is the belief by some donors that cell phones are a less-secure method to make transactions online. Having a responsive website **reinforces the need for extra safety precautions** such as an SSL certificate.

Another option for keeping your site mobile-friendly is creating a separate “**mobile version**” of your website. The advantages of a mobile site are targeting a specific audience on their cellphones or tablets with unique content and a layout adapted for their needs. Minimizing the number of complex forms and displaying links with large graphics helps keep mobile-users engaged.

CONCLUSION

Follow these 7 tips for online donations and enjoy a more satisfied, healthy donor-base for your non-profit.

Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all donations form that will work for every nonprofit, however it is worthwhile understanding your donors and figuring out how best to **brand, simplify, and secure** your donations page.

Give your donors options, including **giving on a regular basis** automatically through your site. And don't forget to “**reward**” them after they've made a donation with unique content that shows them what you have accomplished with their help.

Use fundraising events to expand your donor-base, and fuel your supporters' passion for your cause by making it easy for them to **start their own fundraising campaigns** focused around your event. Make sure to put just as much energy into **following-up** with your event-related donors with quality photos and stories, as you do preparing for the fundraiser itself.

Harness the power of your donors' social contacts. Some donors like to share their involvement with nonprofits with their social networks online, while others may **mobilize their social circle** to attend your fundraising events.

These days, with a growing number of supporters accessing your content on-the-go, it's becoming a necessity to have a **mobile-friendly website**. If your donors get frustrated navigating your site just to get to the donations page, it won't matter how well-branded and secure that page is.

And most importantly, if you're going to accept donations online make sure that you take the **necessary steps so your donors feel their transaction is secure**, whether that means purchasing an SSL certificate or choosing the right payments processor.

Contact us

800-475-4590

info@elevationweb.org

For more information on how you can
use our fundraising, email mar

www.elevationweb.org

