



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES

10 Best Practices for a High-Converting Donation Form

What separates a donation form that converts from one that quietly loses donors, and how top-performing nonprofits design for both donor intent and completed gifts.

Every nonprofit invests in driving traffic to their donation page. Yet the form itself, the final step between donor intent and completed gift, is often the weakest link. A confusing layout, too many required fields, a missing payment method, or no recovery mechanism for abandoning donors can silently erode giving rates and leave meaningful donations uncompleted.

Through years of testing across thousands of campaigns, iDonate has identified the practices that consistently move the needle. This guide distills those findings into 10 actionable best practices organized by stage of the donor journey, so you can benchmark your current form and understand where the greatest opportunities lie.

50%+

of nonprofit web traffic
comes from mobile

2-3x

more value from a
monthly vs. one-time donor

~70%

of donation forms are
abandoned before completion

#	Best Practice	Donor Journey Stage
1	Mobile-First Design	Gift Selection
2	Branded Value Proposition	Gift Selection
3	Intelligent Ask Ladder	Gift Selection
4	Monthly Giving by Default	Gift Selection
5	Recurring Gift Prompt	Post-Selection
6	Streamlined Donor Info	Checkout
7	Multiple Payment Options	Payment
8	Cover-the-Fee Option	Payment
9	Exit-Intent Email Capture	Recovery
10	Persistent Gift Reminder	Recovery

Your Donation Form Is Your Highest-Stakes Page

For most nonprofits, the donation form is the end of a long journey. A donor has seen your mission, felt something, and made the decision to give. By the time they arrive at your form, the hard work of awareness and persuasion is done. What happens next, the form experience itself, determines whether that intent becomes a completed gift.

Industry research consistently shows that donation form abandonment rates hover around 70%. That means roughly seven out of ten people who start a donation do not finish it. Much of that drop-off is preventable, stemming not from donor disinterest but from friction: too many steps, unfamiliar payment methods, slow load times on mobile, or simply a form that doesn't instill confidence.

The best-performing nonprofit forms share a common set of design and UX principles. They reduce cognitive load at every step. They meet donors on the device they're using. They default to outcomes that benefit the organization without pressuring the donor. And they recover gracefully when a donor starts to drift.

The 10 best practices in this guide are organized by stage of the donor journey: gift selection, post-selection, checkout, payment, and recovery. Together, they represent a complete framework for a high-converting giving experience.

A well-optimized donation form doesn't just convert more donors; it converts them into better donors: higher average gifts, more recurring commitments, and fewer lost to abandonment.

STAGE 1: GIFT SELECTION

The gift selection stage is where donors make their two most important decisions: how much to give, and whether to give once or repeatedly. How these choices are framed has an outsized effect on both completed giving and long-term donor engagement.

1 Mobile-First Design

More than 50% of nonprofit traffic comes from mobile, meaning the majority of your potential donors encounter your form on a phone, not a desktop. A mobile-first form ensures fast load times, thumb-friendly actions, and a frictionless checkout experience on any device.

Mobile-first is not the same as mobile-compatible. A truly mobile-first form is designed from the small screen outward: large tap targets, vertically stacked layouts, no precision input required. Every extra second of load time and every pinch-to-zoom moment is a measurable abandonment risk.

2 Branded Value Proposition

A title, supporting copy, and hero image in your organization's brand colors, pulled from what your organization actually does. This gives donors the "why give to you, why now" answer before they ever engage with the form itself.

The value proposition should remain visible throughout the entire checkout process, not just on the first screen. Keeping the cause in view as donors complete subsequent steps continuously reinforces their decision and reduces second-guessing at the moment they're most likely to hesitate.

3 Intelligent Ask Ladder

Donation amounts should be arranged low-to-high, left-to-right, with a pre-highlighted "most popular" amount calibrated to your audience and cause area. This anchoring effect gently guides donors toward a stronger default without added friction: when one option is visually emphasized, donors gravitate toward it, lifting average gift size without pressure.

The suggested amount should be determined by data: your audience, cause area, and campaign context, not chosen arbitrarily. An "Other" field should always be available. The ask ladder is a guide, not a gate.

4 Monthly Giving by Default

When donors arrive at a giving form, the frequency toggle should default to Monthly. Donors who don't actively change the default are already on the path to becoming sustaining supporters, without any additional nudging required.

The math is compelling: a donor who gives \$25 once is worth \$25. A donor giving \$25/month is worth \$300 in year one, and most monthly donors sustain their commitment for two or more years. Defaulting to monthly removes the friction of opting in to recurring giving without pressuring anyone.

Once a donor has selected a gift amount, two opportunities arise before they reach payment: a chance to convert a one-time gift into a recurring commitment, and a checkout experience that either closes the deal or introduces friction.

5

Recurring Gift Prompt

If a donor chooses "Give Once," show them an invitation to make their gift monthly, framed as impact, not obligation. Two pre-set monthly amounts make the choice easy, and a graceful decline option ensures no one feels pressured.

Framing is everything: "*One monthly gift = 12x the impact*" puts the donor in the driver's seat. Pre-set amounts, set lower than the one-time gift, make the monthly option feel accessible. A clearly labeled exit ("*No thanks, just give \$50 this time*") ensures no donor feels trapped. A pressured donor is a lost donor.

Best-in-class nonprofits report that a well-designed recurring gift prompt converts 15-25% of one-time donors into monthly givers, a significant compounding effect on lifetime donor value.

6

Streamlined Donor Info

Only the fields that matter, first name, last name, and email, are required by default. Donors move through quickly without feeling like they're filling out a form. Less friction means more completed donations.

Every required field is a potential exit point. Additional fields like phone number, mailing address, and organizational affiliation should be optional and clearly marked as such. Options like "Donate anonymously" or "Donate as organization" work well as simple checkboxes that don't interrupt the primary flow.

STAGE 4: PAYMENT

The payment step is the final gate between donor intent and a completed transaction. Donors are motivated at this stage; the primary risk is introducing doubt through an unfamiliar process or unexpected friction.

7 Multiple Payment Options

Donors can give using their preferred payment method, including credit card, ACH, PayPal, Apple Pay, or Google Pay. Familiar options reduce friction and help more gifts reach completion.

A form that accepts only credit cards will lose donors who prefer digital wallets or bank transfers. Every missing payment method is a potential abandonment. For mobile donors especially, Apple Pay and Google Pay eliminate typing card details entirely, enabling one-tap checkout that dramatically improves mobile conversion.

8 Cover-the-Fee Option

The option to cover processing fees is shown as a simple, pre-selected choice with clear, friendly language. Donors can opt in easily, with no pressure if they choose not to.

Processing fees, typically 2-3%, reduce how much of each gift actually reaches your mission. A cover-the-fee checkbox, presented transparently and pre-selected by default, gives donors the opportunity to absorb that cost. Simple, honest language like *"Add \$1.60 to help cover fees"* outperforms vague or guilt-driven framing. Transparency builds trust; trust drives opt-in.

When cover-the-fee is presented transparently and pre-selected by default, opt-in rates of 60-80% are common, meaning more of every gift goes directly to the mission without reducing donor participation.

Even a beautifully optimized form will experience abandonment. Distractions happen, donors get pulled away, and second thoughts surface. Recovery best practices ensure an abandoned session is never a permanent loss, and that the recovery experience is as respectful as the giving experience itself.

9

Exit-Intent Email Capture

Instead of losing a donor when they click "X," a friendly exit prompt invites them to stay connected by sharing their email, helping you grow your prospect donor database and follow up later with a timely, thoughtful reminder.

The message should be warm, never desperate: *"Your Generosity Matters. Drop your email below, and we'll send a polite reminder when you're ready."* Two clear options, "Remind Me Later" and "No, Thank You," keep the experience respectful. The follow-up email should arrive within hours, link directly back to the form, and feel like a service, not a sales pitch.

Exit-intent capture turns an otherwise total loss into a future conversion opportunity and a prospect record. A donor who opted in to a reminder is warmer than a cold prospect, and should be treated accordingly.

10

Persistent Gift Reminder

When a donor leaves the form, a subtle reminder stays anchored at the bottom of the screen, even as they browse other pages, saving their gift details and offering a one-click return to checkout or an easy, respectful exit.

The reminder is informative, not intrusive. It keeps the donor's selected gift amount and cause visible, with one click to return to where they left off. A graceful "Not Today" option lets them exit without frustration. A donor who declines today is not a lost donor; they're a future opportunity.

A Framework for the Full Donor Journey

No single best practice on this list is transformative in isolation. What makes them powerful is their compounding effect across the donor journey. A form that defaults to monthly giving, presents a compelling value proposition, minimizes checkout friction, and recovers abandoned sessions is performing at every stage simultaneously, and the cumulative result is meaningfully more completed gifts and a stronger, more committed donor community.

Benchmarking your current form against these 10 practices is a useful starting point. Most organizations will find two or three areas where quick wins are available: a default setting that needs changing, a payment method that's missing, or an exit-intent mechanism that doesn't exist yet. Start there.

Longer-term, the goal is a donation form that works as hard as the rest of your fundraising program, one that treats the donor experience as a design problem worthy of the same attention as your campaigns, your messaging, and your mission.

The best donation forms are invisible. Donors don't notice good UX; they just find themselves having completed a gift, feeling good about it. That is the standard to aim for.

Stage	Practices	Primary Goal
Gift Selection	1-4	Right amount, right frequency, right device
Post-Selection	5	Convert one-time donors to monthly
Checkout	6	Remove friction before payment
Payment	7-8	Meet donors where they are; more of each gift reaches the mission
Recovery	9-10	Recapture intent before it disappears



About iDonate

iDonate is the intelligent online giving solution purpose-built for modern nonprofits. We help organizations raise more for their mission by delivering mobile-first donation experiences that are easy to set up, highly customizable, and seamlessly integrated. iDonate creates a frictionless donor experience at the moment generosity strikes. Learn more at www.idonate.com