How to Choose the Right Web Design Company for Your Nonprofit
A new website can very easily be the kind of can that gets kicked down the road. Many nonprofits are swamped with things to do and have a severe shortage of time on their hands. Plus a new website is a significant investment in terms of both time and money.

But many organizations also realize their website is incredibly important. More than ever, people are turning to the web to assess the work you’re doing. And a solid website is a huge piece of the puzzle when it comes to connecting with new supporters, maintaining relationships with past supporters and generally serving your community.

While every organization is different and has unique needs, we’ve put together this guide to help you find a web company that’s right for your project. Using the questions and considerations below, we hope it’ll be much easier for you to find the best web design company to turn your nonprofit’s vision into a reality.
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Prepare the necessary information

Before jumping on the phone to call all the web design companies you know (or can find on Google), it’s a good idea to compile some important information. Most web design companies will ask you similar initial questions, so you might as well be prepared.
Step One: Prepare the Necessary Information

Here is a list of the questions you should be ready to answer up front.

1.

What are your goals for creating a new website?

Do you want to increase your fundraising? Are you trying to provide a service or education on your website? Do you want to increase your organization’s name recognition? Do you want to grow your volunteer base?

This is the most critical question to answer before you begin the process of building a new website. Remember, your new website is an investment. It should generate a return for your organization.

2.

Who are you targeting with your new website?

Having an idea of who you’re targeting with the website helps you create a site that presents information clearly, meets the needs of your users and helps them accomplish their goals. You’ll want to break your target audience into groups, and get as granular as possible about how each group is likely to use your website.

It’s your job to identify your target market. It’s the web design company’s job to translate your target market into a site that delivers results.
3.

**What do you want your website to do?**

Many of the answers to this question stem from the goals you provided before and help to outline the features you want on your new website. Do you want an online donation form that integrates with your donor management system? Do you want to manage volunteers or handle event registration on the website? Do you want to allow board members to download files from the website?

There are an enormous number of things your website can do, so having an idea of what those things are will streamline the process of finding and selecting a company to help you. Depending on the limitations of your budget, it may also be worth prioritizing the features to more easily determine what can and cannot be included in the final website.

4.

**Can you list some organizations that provide similar services to your nonprofit?**

List out some organizations that are similar and provide links to their websites. Based on what’s out there, web design firms can better determine which techniques are likely to succeed and which are likely to fail on your website. They can also find opportunities for you to be innovative and stand out from the crowd.
Step One: Prepare the Necessary Information

5.

What are three websites you like and three that you don’t like? Why?

This allows web design companies to get an idea of the type of design or specific functionality that you like. Once you start the project you’ll probably have to answer questions about design in much more depth.

6.

What is your budget?

This question is always one of the most difficult to answer, but it is so important for a web design company. Buying a website is like buying a car. You add features and the price goes up. The big difference between a website and a car is that the features you can add to a website are basically never ending and typically, more features equals better results.

A budget helps web companies determine what’s feasible, giving them a framework to determine what features to include in their proposal. If you don’t know exactly how much your organization is willing to spend, provide a range or a top-end price. You may not know how much it will cost, but you know there is no way you can spend more than $15,000. If that’s all you know, then let the companies know...
that too. It’s their job to provide your organization with the best possible website given your budgetary constraints.

7.

Who is going to be the point person on the project?

While it might make sense to have two or more people providing feedback throughout the project, it’s always good to have one person responsible for communicating with the web design company and delivering materials by the given deadlines. Doing so helps increase accountability and ensure nothing gets lost in the shuffle.

* We’d recommend placing these questions and the answers to each into a document you can provide to each web company when asking for a proposal. This will not only speed up the time it takes to receive proposals, but could actually lower the price once the firm sees you as an accountable organization that will finish deliverables on schedule.
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Choose a small number of web design companies

There are a ton of web design companies in the United States and not surprisingly, almost every one of them has a website. So how, out of all these companies, do you find the ones that’ll be a good fit for your project? How do you begin picking which ones to talk to?
How to search for web companies

There are a lot of ways to find a website design company for your nonprofit. Here are a few good places to start.

**Google search “web design” + your location**

This one might seem obvious, but it doesn’t hurt to mention it. While many organizations don’t care about working with a local company as long as they get strong results, you may want a local shop. If so, include your city in your search.

**Google search “nonprofit website design”**

If you’re looking for a company that specializes in working with nonprofits, make that a part of your search. You can also try related searches like “nonprofit web design company” or “nonprofit web designers” to get more results.

**Look in the footer of websites you like**

Oftentimes the company that created a website will be listed in the website’s footer. If you come across a website you really like, check the footer to see if you can find the company that made the website.

**Check out blog authors**

If you find a particularly helpful article relating to nonprofit website design on a blog, check out the author’s background. It’s possible the author works for a website design company.

**Ask other nonprofits**

Check out the websites of organizations you partner with or know in some way. If you like any of their sites, ask for referrals and check out their web design company for yourself.
Step Two: Choose a Small Number of Web Design Companies

How to filter out companies without talking to them

During your search you’re likely to find a lot of companies, but if you want to have time to do anything else besides talk to web designers, you should cut down the list to a manageable number. We suggest starting with a list of five, but it’s really up to you.
You don’t like their website designs

Check out the company’s portfolio and if you don’t like any of the websites they’ve made, chances are you won’t like the website they make for your nonprofit. You likely won’t love all of their designs, but you should see some work that resonates with you.

They haven’t tweeted or updated their Facebook page in more than six months

An outdated social media presence is a good sign that the organization doesn’t have the capacity to handle your project or doesn’t immerse themselves in the technologies they’re offering.

Pricing is out of your range

Sometimes organizations will list their pricing on their website. If their price is out of your budget, you can take them off of your list.

They’re in a niche that doesn’t fit

If the company’s website says they focus on mobile app development, or websites for lawyers, they’re probably not a good fit for your new nonprofit website.

One of these might not be a deal breaker for you, and that’s okay. Just remember that there are tons of web design companies out there, so you have the opportunity to be a little picky.
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You gathered your information and found some great web design companies. Now it’s time to send over the information you compiled in step one.
Caution: Don’t prepare an RFP

It’s important to note here we’re not advocating you send over a Request for Proposal (RFP).

RFPs tend to constrain web design companies by outlining exactly how the website should be built. Not only will every web design company have a unique process they think works best, but you also want to give each company the opportunity to provide innovative suggestions and point you in the right direction, even if that direction is different from what you expected.

RFPs also take a lot of time to put together. And we know most nonprofits don’t have a shortage of things to do.

Instead of sending an RFP, compile your answers and send them as a guide, explaining to each company that you simply hope to inform the conversation. At that point it’s up to the web design company to lead you through the remainder of the process.
Step Three: Send Your Information to the Web Design Companies

An early indicator of communication

Once you’ve sent your information you have an opportunity to get an idea of each company’s ability to communicate effectively. Take note of how long they take to get back to you via email or phone, whether or not they respond when they say they will and how quickly they get you a proposal.

If they struggle with communication during the sales process, they likely won’t fare well when the project starts.
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Get answers to all the important questions

At this point the process can move in a number of different directions. Typically you’ll start by receiving a proposal that outlines the timeline, features and price of your new website.

No matter how the process progresses from here on out, you’ll want each company to answer the following questions. Once answered, determining the best fit for your nonprofit should be much simpler.
Step Four: Get Answers to All the Important Questions

**General Administrative**

1. What is the price of the project? Is that price fixed or is it possible the price will change throughout the project? If it’s going to change, will you be notified before receiving an invoice?

2. How long will it take to complete the project?

3. Do they have any sample work that includes the features and functionality you want in your new website?

4. Do they have any references you can call to ask about their work?

5. Who will be in charge of managing the project for the web design company? Do they have a single point person?

**The Website Design Process**

1. What information must be provided before the project can start?

2. What work and time investment is required from your nonprofit once the project starts?

3. Will the website be built from a template design or designed from scratch?

4. How many pages will be designed for your organization before the website is programmed?
Step Four: Get Answers to All the Important Questions

5. How many times, if at all, will your organization be able to see a fully programmed and workable website before it goes live for the world to see?

6. At what point in the process will content be added to the website and who will be adding the content?

Ensuring Website Quality

1. How will the company go about making the website search engine friendly? They should at the very least talk about programming code, content, sitemaps and load speed.

2. What web browsers will the company test in prior to launching the website? They should test in at least Internet Explorer 8, Internet Explorer 9, Firefox, Chrome, Safari and Opera. If you want the website to be mobile-friendly make sure to ask about testing there as well.

3. What steps does the company take to make the website load quickly? While this is pretty technical, listen for them to discuss things like caching, image compression, image sprites and HTML and CSS minification.
Step Four: Get Answers to All the Important Questions

Hosting and Website Integration

1. How does the company recommend you host the new website? How much will it cost initially and on a recurring basis? Are support and security updates included or do they cost extra?

2. How will the website integrate with your social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, etc.?

3. How will the website integrate with your other online tools, such as a donor management or email newsletter system?

Planning for After the Website’s Completion

1. What training, if any, will be included at the end of the project?

2. Will your nonprofit be able to update the website without the assistance of the web design company?

3. How will the company handle any additional maintenance and support after the project is finished?

4. Does the company include any process to review the website at a later date and tell your organization what’s working and what isn’t?

5. How can your organization determine if the website is successful after it goes live? Make sure they are providing some type of analytics and measurement tool for you to use. This tool should be configured to align to your goals for creating the website in the first place.
While some of these questions will be more important to your nonprofit than others, the above list should serve as a good starting point for the information you’ll want to know before making a final decision.

The key is to make sure you’re comprehensive. We know it takes time, but the web design process is long and detailed. You definitely don’t want anything important to slip through the cracks.
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After careful review and questioning it’s time to pick the best company for your project. The qualities that make one company stand out compared to another will be different for every organization. The key here is to make sure you are comparing apples to apples.

A company you really like may have a price that’s much higher than the others. Before tossing them out, make sure they’re providing the same features, functionality and quality as the other organizations. Maybe they’re including mobile development and a better plan to optimize your website for search engines. Maybe they’re integrating your online donations with your donor management system.

In any case, make sure you’re looking at each company on a level playing field. And don’t be afraid to ask them exactly what’s included in their proposal. If anything is vague or unclear, it could become problematic down the road.
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We’ve been through this process quite a few times and have seen where projects can fall apart. Here are the most common pitfalls we see during the process of selecting a web design company.
Choosing the cheapest company because they’re the cheapest

This really goes for any vendor, but be careful when choosing the cheapest company to do your new website. If the quality isn’t good your visitors will suffer, and the investment you made won’t provide nearly the return you were hoping for.

First and foremost, make sure you pick an organization that you think will do a great job. After that, if they’re the least expensive, then consider that a bonus.

Choosing someone to make the website who does this part-time

While it may be tempting to work with someone who makes websites part-time because of the low cost or a personal relationship, this comes with a lot of risk:

- They may take a lot longer than a typical web design company to finish the project.
- They may get really busy in their full-time job and stop working on your project completely.
A Final Thought: Common Pitfalls in the Process

• They may do both the design and programming for your website. This can work, but generally good design and programming require very different skillsets and backgrounds.

• They may not be around after the project is complete to offer maintenance and support.

3. Asking a print designer to design for the web

The web world and the print world are very different. In the print world you use inches instead of pixels. In the web world you have to be concerned with links, rollovers and navigation, along with considering interactivity and user experience. While someone might be great with print design, they might not be well versed the intricacies of designing for the web. If possible, use someone with web design experience to design your website.

4. Not having a point person for your nonprofit from the start

We listed this one above, but it deserves repeating. It is always a good idea to have someone who is accountable for keeping the project moving forward and getting things done right. When the point person is unclear deadlines get missed, emails disappear without a trace and the quality of your final website suffers.
When all is said and done, your nonprofit should be on its way to an awesome website with a great web design company.

Think we may be a good fit for your project? Find out more about working with us and get a quote for your nonprofit’s new website.

GET A PROPOSAL

wiredimpact.com/get-proposal

Or call us at 314-801-1328
About Wired Impact

We know a website can and should be more than simply a pretty place for people to see what you do. It should have a meaningful impact on your organization, such as:

• *Boosting fundraising* by inspiring website visitors to become donors and helping you maintain relationships with past donors

• *Increasing volunteerism* by connecting you with new volunteers and easing the process of managing volunteer events

• *Raising awareness* of your organization by publishing content that resonates with potential supporters and making information easy for them to find

• *Serving your community* by sharing educational content or offering tools your community members rely on

Your website shouldn’t just be an online brochure. It should be helping your nonprofit do more good in the community.
A Bit About Our Team

The following folks at Wired Impact collaborated on this guide:

Jonathan Goldford
Jonathan spends the majority of his time focused on web programming and is passionate about encouraging nonprofits to use the web as a tool to impact the community.

David Hartstein
David spends most of his time helping nonprofits tell their stories in a more compelling way and using data to measure the benefits an organization can glean from its website.

Rori Spivey
Rori spends her time planning, sketching, and designing the look and feel of nonprofit websites to not only look great, but also compel visitors to act.

We’re social and quite friendly, so if you have any questions or just feel like reaching out, we’d love to hear from you.

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