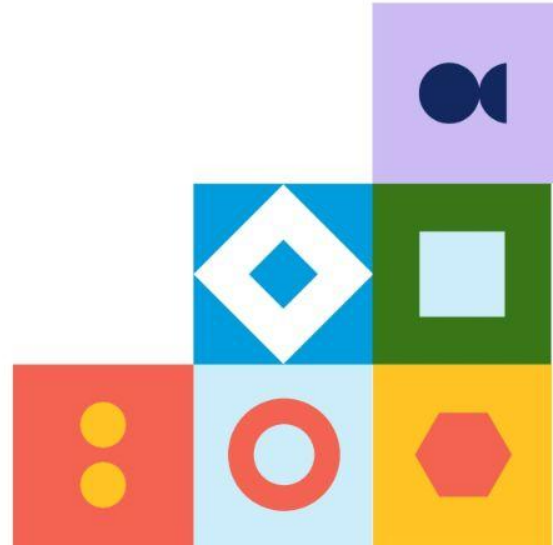
Steal This Playbook:

UX Lessons From Nonprofit Websites

Presented by:
Joanna Jackson & Janna Fiester of Sandstorm®



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Hi, we're Sandstorm®

Janna Fiester
(she/her)
Vice president of UX and Creative
Drupal.org: jannafiester

Joanna Jackson
(she/her)
UX Researcher & Designer
Drupal.org: joannajackson

Fun facts about Sandstorm®

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Acquia Community Partner

Drupal Certified Partner – Silver

Accessibility-certified, creative technology agency for 25+ years for **purpose-driven brands**

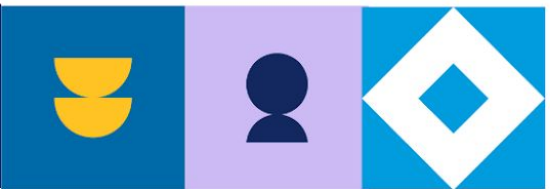
Deep expertise with **Global Non-Profits, Healthcare, Professional Associations, & Higher Ed**

IAAP CERTIFIED CPACC

Certifications:
CPACC (accessibility), AWS Cloud, Pantheon, Acquia, Drupal, DEIB, and WBENC (women-owned)

Interdisciplinary team: UX, UI, AI, strategy, technology, analytics

UX practice started by **Ph.D in human factors** in 2006



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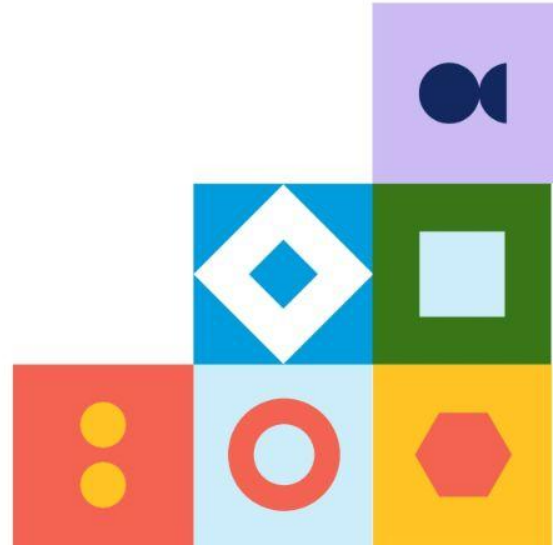
THE CHALLENGE

Since March 2025, **trust in nonprofits has fallen to 35%**

Source: Johnson Center

Most nonprofit websites fail in the same ways

- Users don’t understand what the organization does
- Navigation is vague or confusing
- Impact is buried or abstract
- Trust requires too much effort
- It’s unclear what to do next



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OPPORTUNITY

In a low-trust internet, the job of UX isn’t persuasion. It’s proof.

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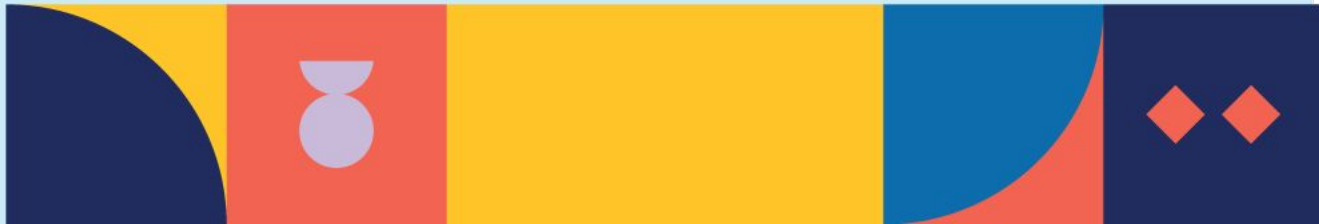
7 Actionable UX Plays:

What you can do today



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1 You navigation builds trust

MJHS FOUNDATION

Our Mission | Giving Options | Ways to Make a Gift | Our Donors | Events | Caring Connections | Contact Us

DONATE

MJHS.org

Help us provide quality health care for at-risk New Yorkers.

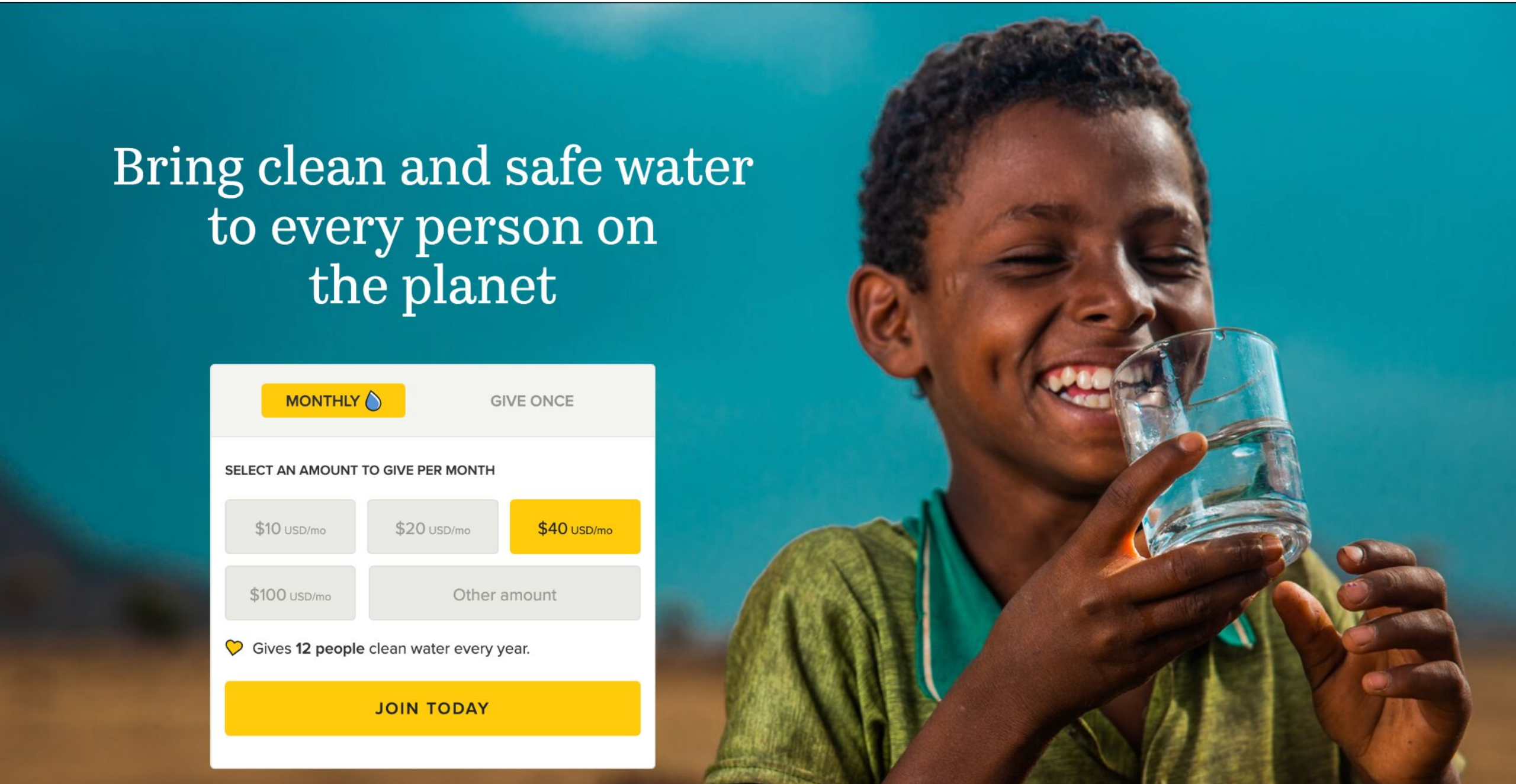
Menorah and Isabella Centers

Dementia Care

Pediatric Hospice Care

Caregiver Support

End of Life Care



Bring clean and safe water to every person on the planet

MONTHLY | GIVE ONCE

SELECT AN AMOUNT TO GIVE PER MONTH

$10 USD/mo | $20 USD/mo | $40 USD/mo

$100 USD/mo | Other amount

Gives **12 people** clean water every year.

JOIN TODAY

MJHS FOUNDATION

Our Mission | Giving Options | Ways to Make a Gift | Our Donors | Events | Caring Connections | Contact Us

DONATE

MJHS.org

Help us provide quality health care for at-risk New Yorkers.

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Caregiver Support

End of Life Care

MJHS FOUNDATION

What We Fund | Ways to Give | Donor Impact | Events | About | GIVE TO MJHS

COMPASSIONATE CARE

Together, we ensure at-risk New Yorkers receive the care and compassion they deserve.

OUR MISSION

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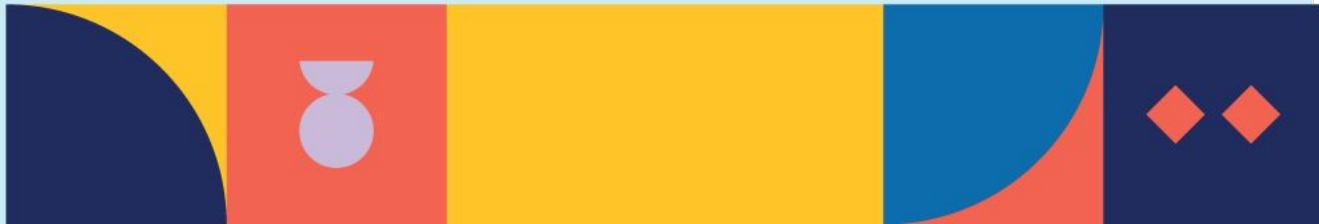
NON-PROFIT PLAY 1

Your navigation needs to answer questions like what you do, how you help, and where the money goes.



2

Earn the right to simplify navigation

UNICEF wanted to see if their navigation helped or hindered engagement

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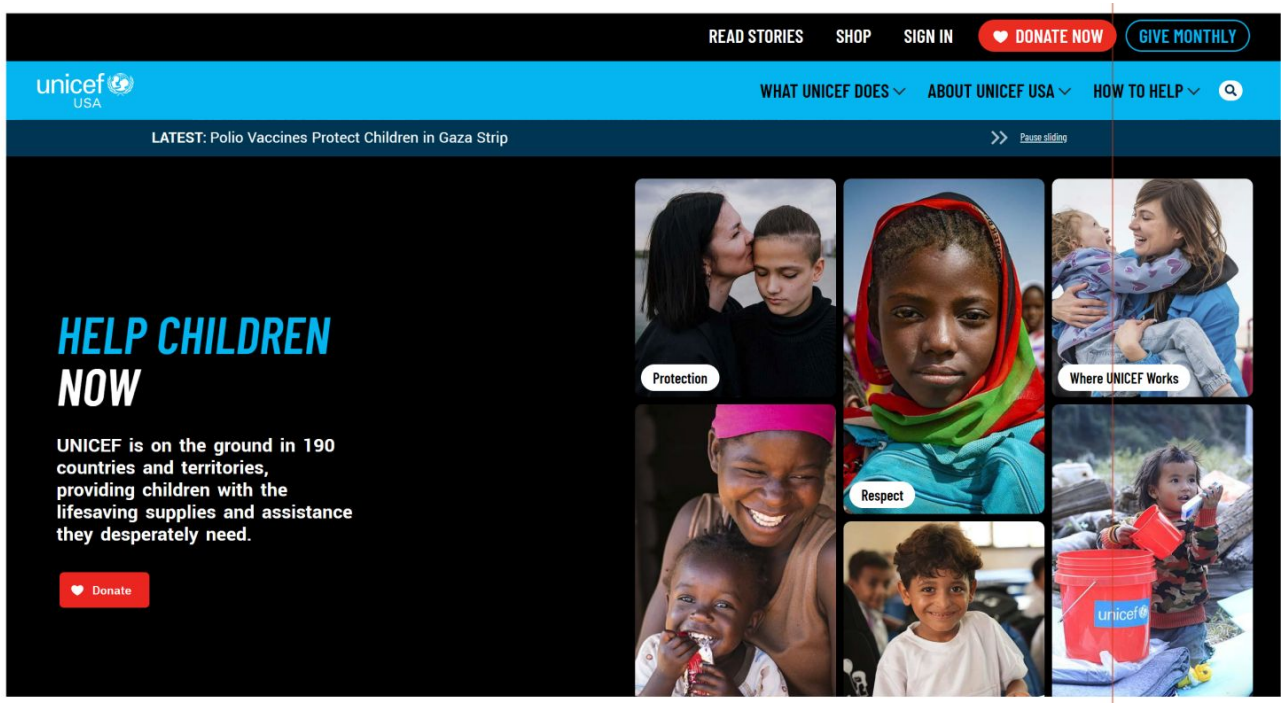

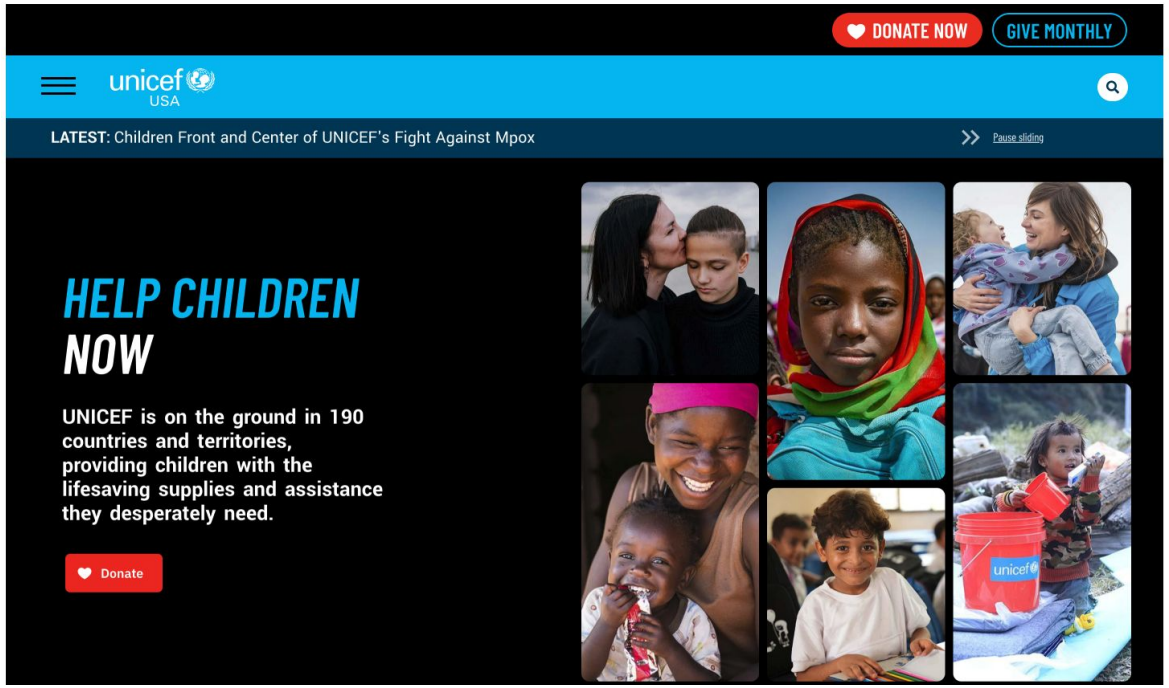

Experiment through A/B studies

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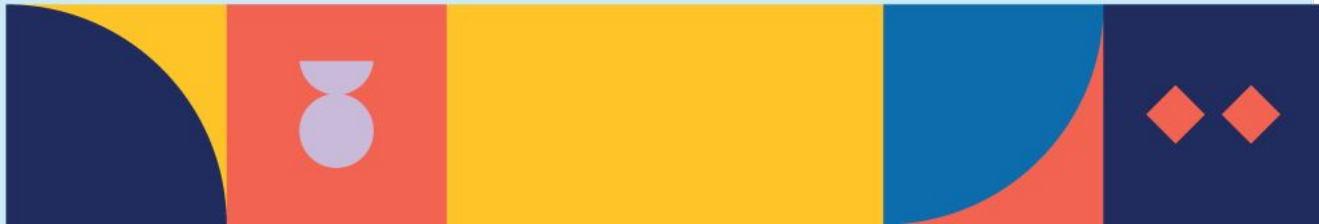
THE RESULT

Donations increased by almost 7%

when the navigation was moved into a hamburger menu

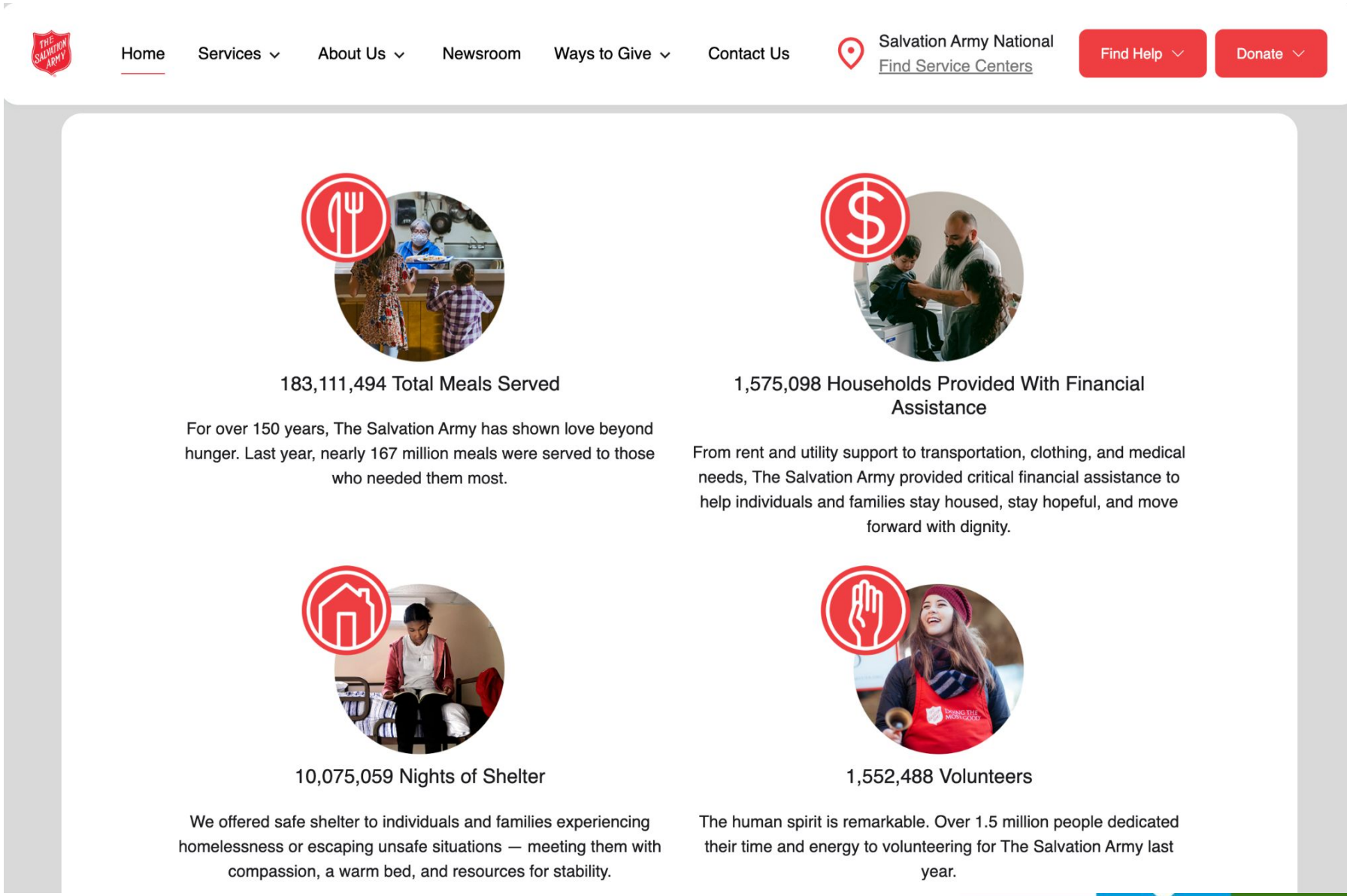
NON-PROFIT PLAY 2

Simplify navigation only when users already trust and recognize your brand



3 People give to outcomes, not ideas

Large numbers are impressive but **are hard to relate to and quickly understand.**



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Numbers based on real results from donations are easier to understand and more inspiring.

Giving Examples:

Interactive tools make the donation experience more personal

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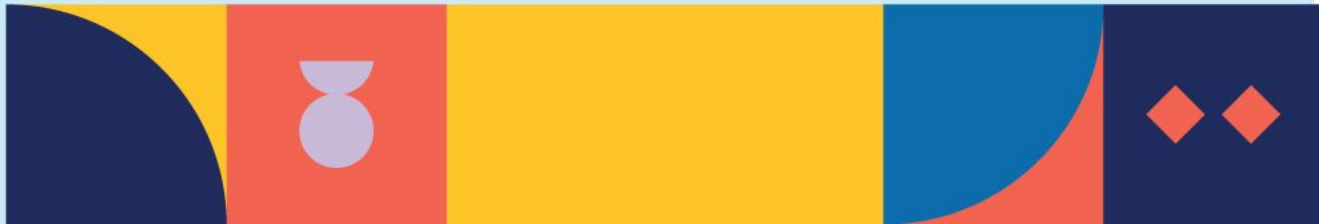
NON-PROFIT PLAY 4

Don’t say “we helped thousands.” Show exactly what someone’s $5 can do.



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4

Financial docs increase perceived credibility, even when not opened

Transparency builds trust even when people don’t read the details.

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unicef USA

Home > About UNICEF USA

FINANCES

UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories, helping to save and meaningfully improve the lives of children globally – focusing on the most vulnerable by providing health care and immunization, clean water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more. UNICEF USA advances the global mission of UNICEF by rallying the American public to support the world’s most vulnerable children and uphold their rights.

Donate

Independent Monitors Recognize UNICEF USA

UNICEF USA has been awarded GuideStar’s Platinum Seal of Transparency, the highest rating, in recognition of the honesty and visibility we provide to supporters.

We’ve also earned a Four-Star rating from Charity Navigator, the best possible score for nonprofits, indicating to donors that they can confidently give to UNICEF USA as our passions and values are aligned with our supporters.

UNICEF USA’s reported (PDF) program expense ratio of 86 percent means we are a highly efficient charity, as defined by independent monitors. For every dollar spent, 86 cents goes directly toward helping children; we spend about 12 cents on fundraising costs and just under 2 cents on administration.

View our Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2025 here.

Charity Navigator FOUR-STAR

View Charity Navigator Rating

Platinum Transparency 2026 Candid.

View GuideStar/Candid Rating

Explain the numbers clearly before linking to the documents.

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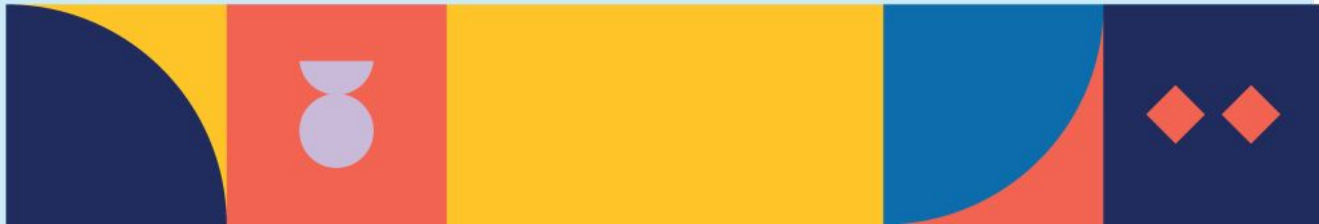
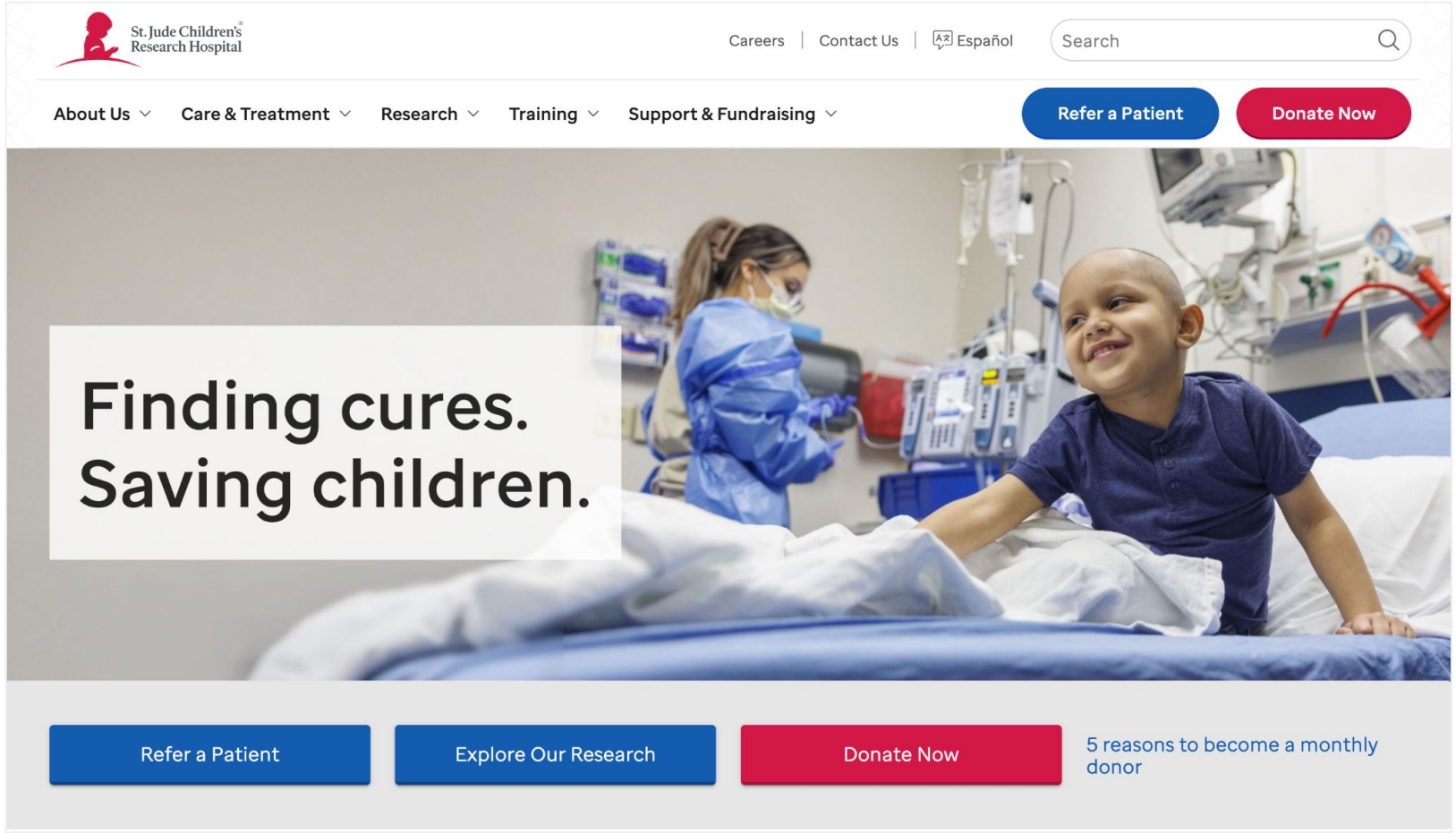
NON-PROFIT PLAY 4

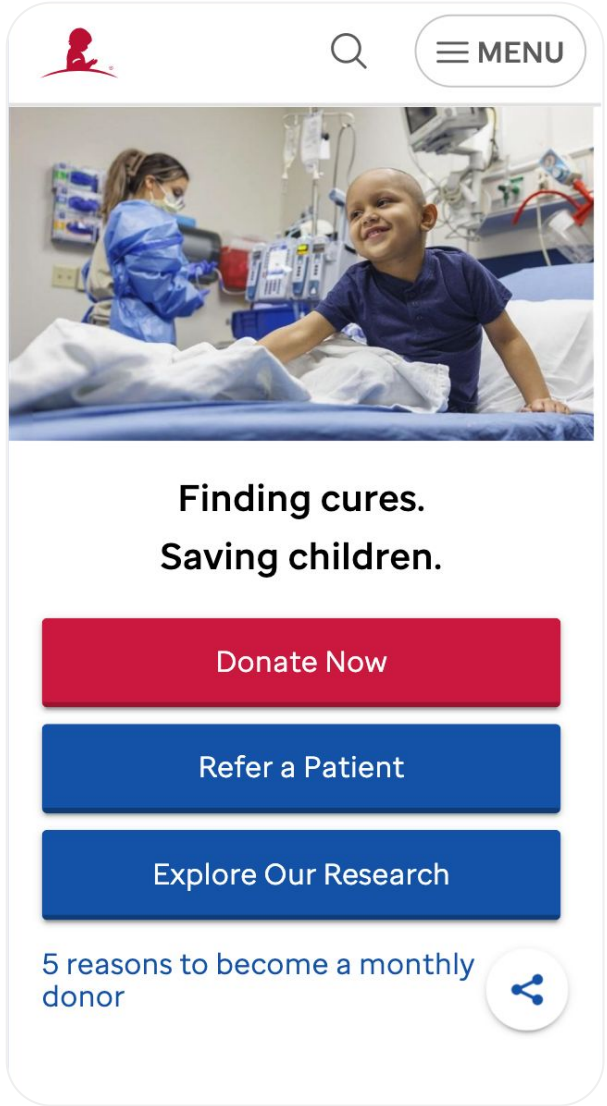
Promote third-party ratings if you have them, but always show a clear spending breakdown and publish your financial reports.



5 Use your CTAs to create empathy

Consistently use CTAs to guide the user and reflect their journey.





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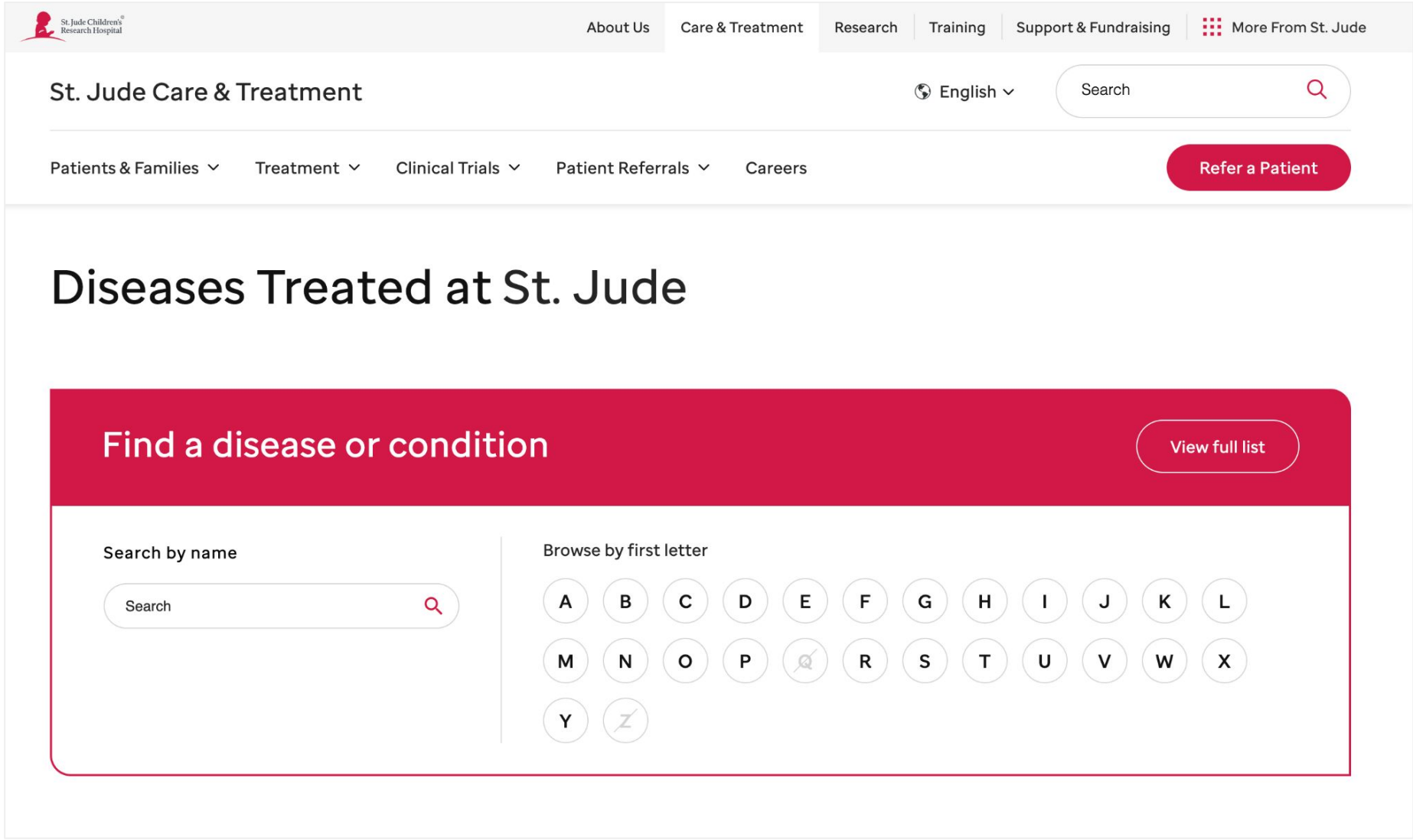
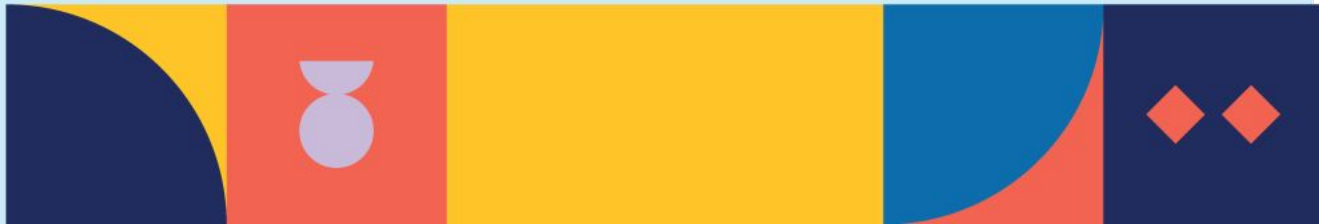
CTAs should reflect the user goals



NON-PROFIT PLAY 5

Make the next step clear and reflect the user journey on every page



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6 Visuals carry meaning users don’t forget

AUNT MARTHA'S
HEALTH & WELLNESS

Imagery and wording can actively turn users away.

NEWS & UPDATES

Aunt Martha's stories

January 11, 2022

Aunt Martha's at 50: A Statement from Raul Garza, Aunt Matha's President and CEO

Read more

January 11, 2022

Aunt Martha's at 50: A Statement from Raul Garza, Aunt Matha's President and CEO

Read more

November 8, 2021

Rep. Underwood, HHS Secretary Becerra and IDPH Director Ezike Visit Aunt Martha's for Roundtable on Maternal Health Disparities

Read more

NEWS & UPDATES

SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT TODAY

Find a location or call 877-692-8686.

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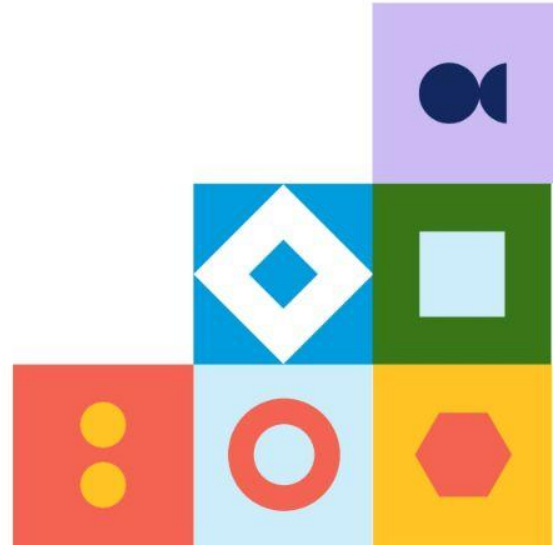
Choose imagery that builds trust, not friction

Avoid images that:

- Feature polarizing individuals without clear, positive context
- Feel manipulative or AI-generated
- Create doubt about the organization's intent or value

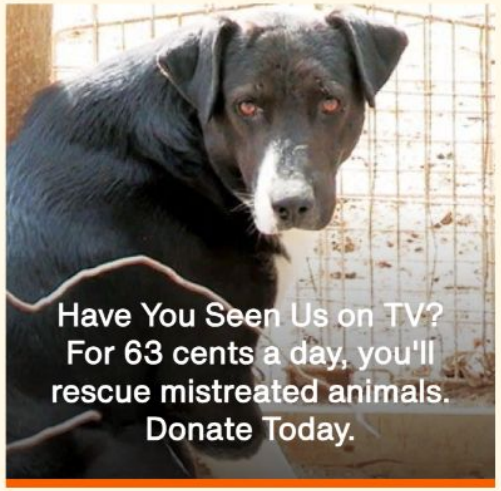
Use images that:

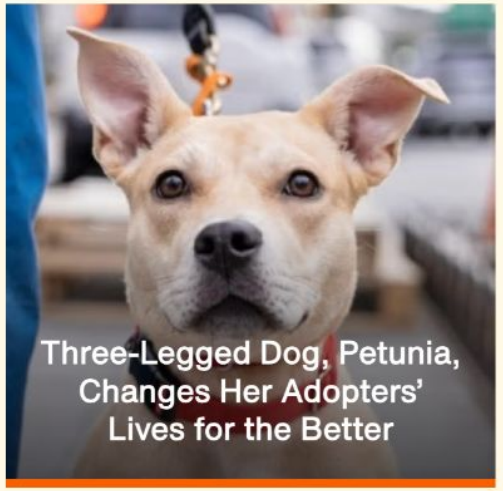
- Shows real impact and outcomes
- Feel real and authentic

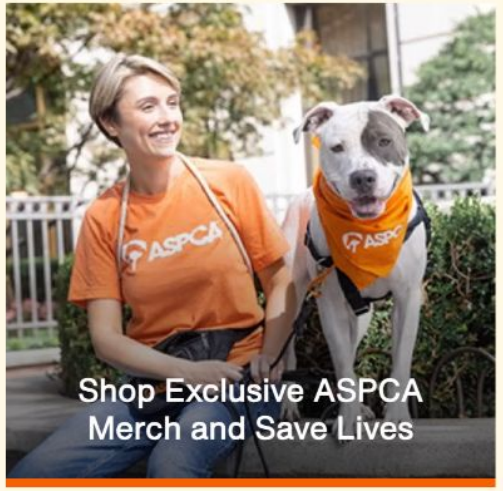


Sarah McLachlan
ASPCA Supporter

Featured Highlights







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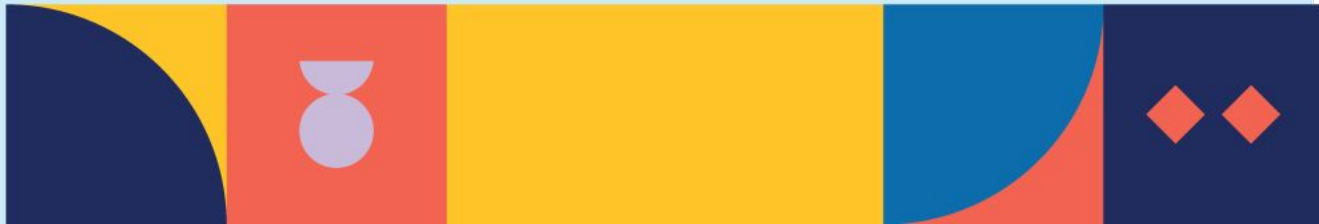
NON-PROFIT PLAY 6

Use inclusive, outcome-focused imagery that reflects your audience



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7

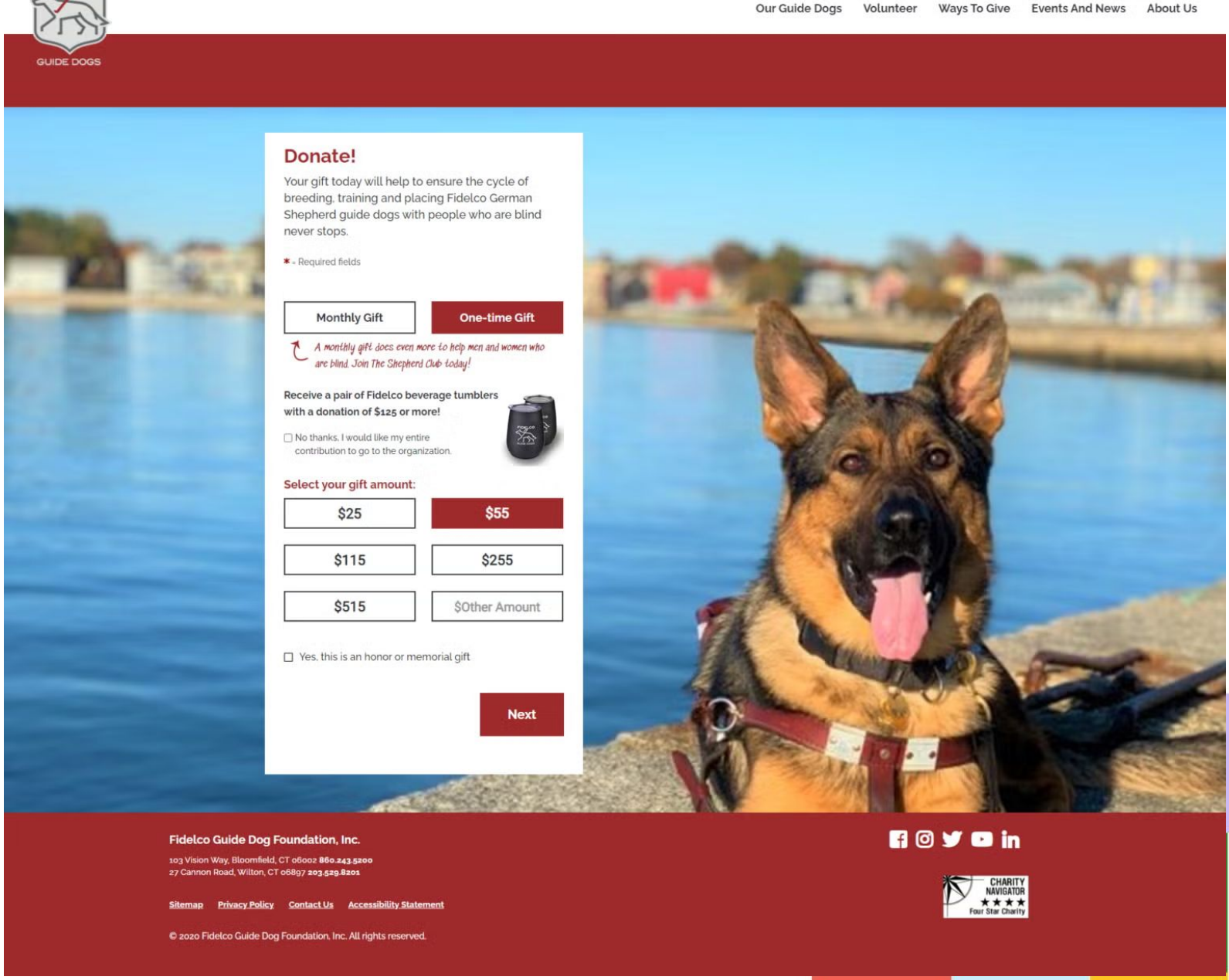
Sometimes fewer clicks is not the answer

Normally we want to reduce clicks, but forms are are exception.

A/B study of two forms:

Multi-page form

Source: The Engage Blog



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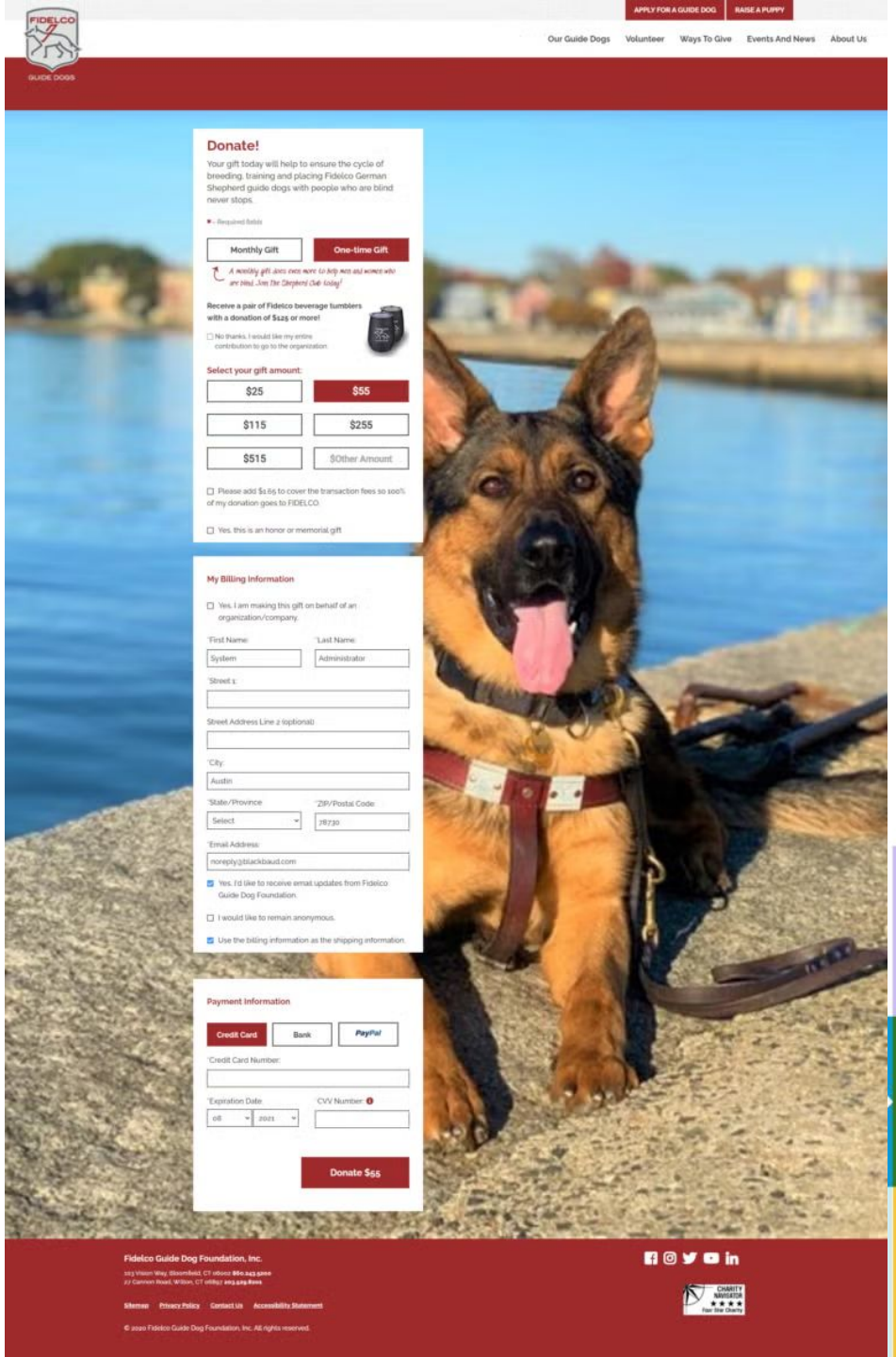
VS:
A one-page form

Source: [The Engage Blog]



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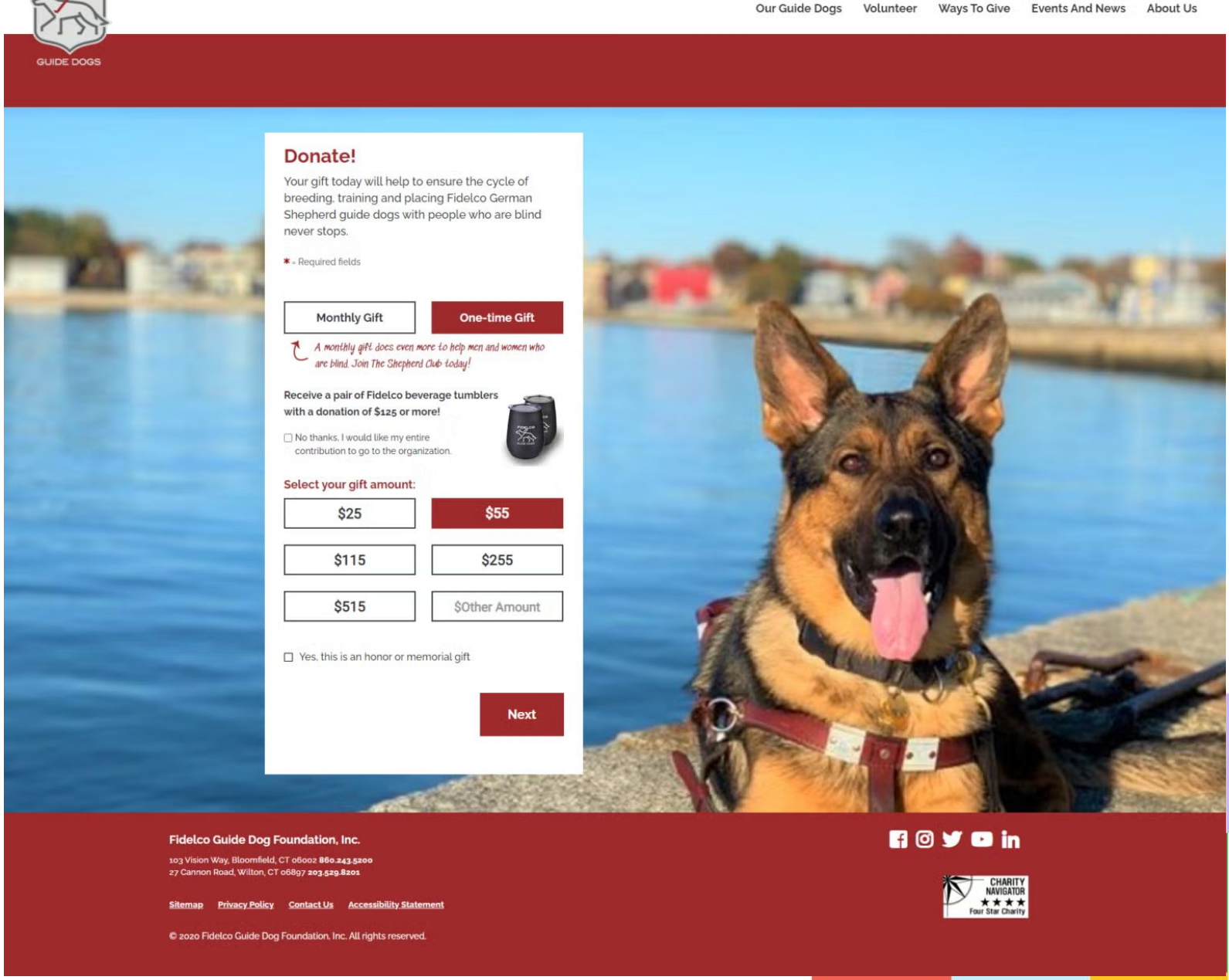
Multi-step donation forms outperform single-page forms:

- +75% higher conversion rate
- +54% higher average donation

Source: [The Engage Blog]



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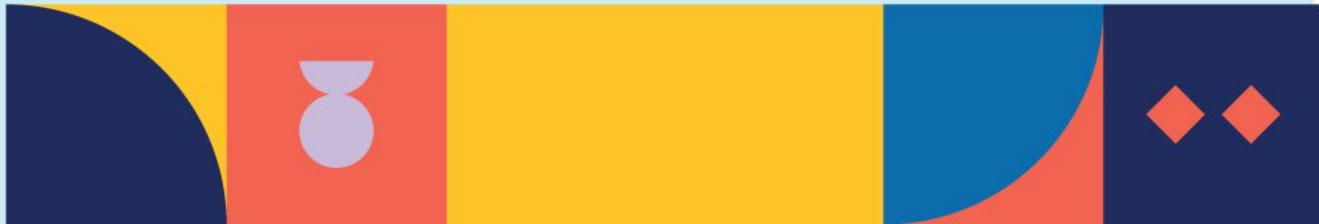
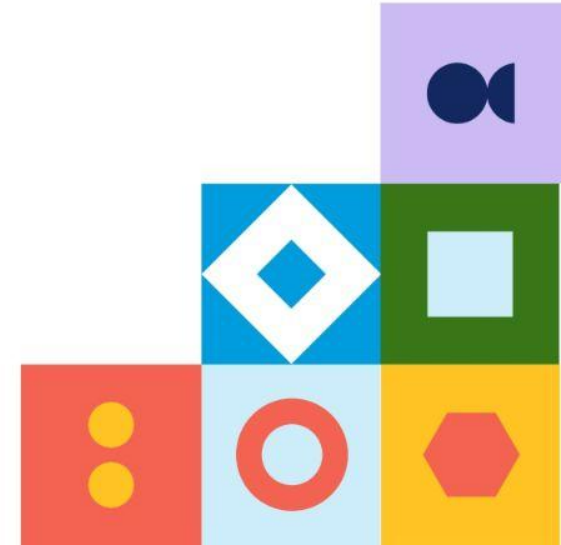
NON-PROFIT PLAY 7

Break long forms up to give users control when donating



UX Playbook

1. Make sure your navigation answers who you are and what you do
2. Test your brand and navigation via A/B test to optimize for donations
3. Show exactly how someone's donations are used
4. Promote third-party ratings and share financial reports
5. Guide the user through your site and have CTAs reflect their journey
6. Use outcome-focused imagery that reflects your audience
7. Break long forms up to give your users control



Say Hello

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We Would Love Your Feedback

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