

# A Transformation in Online Giving

Online fundraising practices in  
Canadian Christian Charities

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### Acknowledgements

This research project would not have been possible without the support of Charity Research and Development Foundation Canada, the [Bridgeway Foundation](#), and the Seacrest Foundation in partnering with us and funding this study.

*Statement of Disclosure: the research team at Frontier Marketing Co. has an ongoing contract with Union Gospel Mission Vancouver, and has previously consulted with Young Life of Canada and SIM Canada.*

# About the Researchers

## Frontier

Frontier Marketing Co. is a digital-first agency with a vision to strengthen the cause-based world through efficient and effective fundraising best practices. Frontier consists of a team of technically savvy individuals with skills in direct marketing strategy, writing, design, and programming. Their office is located in an industrial neighbourhood of Victoria, BC.

Frontier's three researchers spent 90 days researching and happily donating to 92 charities across Canada to evaluate how Canadian Christian charities are faring in the increasingly-digital giving sphere. The findings of this report both informed and inspired our team to take a long hard look at the work we do, and how we can always strive for improvement, especially in the ever-changing world of online giving.

## Benjamin Johnson, CPA, CMA

*Executive Director, Frontier*

Ben is the founder and Executive Director of Frontier, and the lead researcher for this report. He has worked in the nonprofit world for nearly ten years, all of them in marketing or development. He's raised millions of dollars online and worked with hundreds of charities across Canada. His training as an accounting professional has allowed him to approach research and fundraising through a unique technical lense. He spends his Fridays with his son and daughter making waffles and playing at the park.

## Derek Weiss

Derek Weiss is a social innovation and digital marketing professional in Vancouver, BC. As Manager of Community Engagement at Union Gospel Mission, Derek leads a talented team who are catalyzing change through innovative events like Summer Connect, the Eastside Stride, and Uncovering Vision.

As Principal at CharityWings Marketing, Derek helps over a dozen charities leverage Google AdWords Grants, leading to over \$1 Million in granted AdWords in 2014. He has ten years of combined management and marketing experience helping charities increase net revenue, grow awareness, and build strong, effective teams.

Derek holds a Master of Arts degree from Regent College, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Columbia Bible College. He lives in Metro Vancouver with his wife Claire and their rabbit Sumo.

# Key Findings

## 1. Think small, gain big.

Overall, the most striking figure of our study, and the area of greatest potential improvement for the charities studied, would be to improve the mobile giving experience. 53 of 92 charities we studied did not have responsive websites. In other words, they were not optimized for all sizes of devices.

This comes while traffic to charity websites — and the internet at large — from both iPhones and Android devices is skyrocketing. Reportedly, 25% of internet users now solely use mobile, while a 2014 report by DonorDrive indicates that a responsive website could double mobile giving.

*If you can't read and navigate your website without pinching the screen, donors will be less likely to give.*

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## 2. To give is an emotional decision not a rational one.

Donors give to charities for a myriad of reasons. Some give because they're moved by a story, while others want to help change lives, or simply feel connected to others. Beyond a tax receipt and the joy of giving, the donor is getting nothing back unless the fundraising experience is transformative. This leaves giving with one mandate: give donors a transformational experience, not a transactional one. Giving online shouldn't feel like buying online.

Common areas of concern among the charities we studied include using the language “add to cart,” asking for more money to pay for credit card fees, or using unfriendly language on the donate form or confirmation email such as “submit” or “donoreply@yourcharity.org.” *Only 23 of the charities studied had a personalized message on the thank-you page and only 37 of the charities had a thankful and human email response (non-transactional).* This leaves much room for improvement.

*The database is not in charge. Every extra field in your form is likely to lower your conversion rate.*

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## 3. Tell the donor how much to give.

When done right, specific ask amounts increase the conversion rate of giving and even the average gift size. Creating a case for support for giving leads to increased giving. Donors are known to give up to three times more to charities that show the problem being solved and where their dollars will go. However, we noticed that 68% of the charities we studied gave

no suggested amount or any explanation of how funds are used. 45% made no attempt to describe how the donor's gift would be spent.

*Your donors aren't experts in giving and need your assistance to determine an appropriate gift.*

#### 4. Have your documents ready.

Many donors don't want to be embarrassed to learn that they've endorsed a charity that, in their perception, wastes their money. These donors will seek out a trustmark, assurance that their information is kept private, or recent financial statements showing how their money will be spent. According to a 2011 study, 74% of individuals indicated that they'd like to see financial information prior to making a donation. In addition, 71% of foundations indicated that they'd look for financials as well, prior to making a contribution.

##### *Basic standards of documentation on trust-building are not common:*

- 53% of the charities had a privacy policy,
- 39% had an ethical standards page,
- 33% had financial reports, and
- 27% had a current (within two years) annual report online.

20 of the 92 charities did not list their charity registration number on the website, and had no trustmark or proven affiliation of any kind. On the other end of the spectrum, only 20 did have their charity number, with security badge and other affiliations on the footer of each page.

*An easy way to look for quality of your privacy policy: does the policy follow any/all of Canada's recommended standards as set out by Imagine Canada, AFP, or CCCC.*

#### 5. Google needs to be recognized and understood

Only 13 of the 92 charities studied appeared to have a Google AdWords Grant that gives \$120,000 - \$480,000 per year in free adwords advertising to virtually any nonprofit that applies. Even worse, it wasn't uncommon for another charity's ad (perhaps a US affiliate) to be the first paid result on a google search.

To add urgency to mobile giving and search engine optimization, beginning April 21 of this year, Google is expanding its use of mobile-friendliness as a signal for page ranking.

*Google is doing its part to help motivate charities who still don't have a mobile site to build one.*

# Introduction

Fundraising practices have transformed immensely in the past few years. The way things are moving, it feels like we need a dictionary (or [a list of fundraising terms](#)) to keep up with the jargon alone. While fundraising has gone digital, there appears to be a gap in the fundraising practices of charity organizations. With [online giving increasing by 18.1%](#) for faith-based organizations in 2013 alone, the urgency for creating great online fundraising experiences has never been greater.

Recognizing this gap, Frontier conducted research of online fundraising practices among 92 members of the [Canadian Council of Christian Charities](#). Our researchers visited these 92 charity websites, recording scores as they navigated the site and gave \$10 donations.

While much of the scoring was focused around the donor's user experience, charities have many opportunities to improve stewardship practices along the way, including during the post-donation experience. Therefore, the report is organized according to a donor's chronological experience of giving online:

- The donor's user experience when they are giving or are about to give
- The post-donation experience that potentially increases donor loyalty, and
- The stewardship opportunities along the way that lead to higher giving

We have also included a section on how to best utilize Google's services to your organization's advantage.

Our findings lay out a series of best-practices that can be used to evaluate any charity website, as well as steps to make some of the most critical changes. This report is designed to inform and inspire charities to improve and implement effective online fundraising practices to enact change within the digital sphere.

# Scoring



The scores given were based on two [rubrics](#) which provided objective scoring for functional web design (out of 70) and donor experience (out of 100). We used a range to rate performance and placed focus on measuring a stated objective. We assigned a relative weight to each of the best practices as some practices have greater effects on the donor experience than others. These “score sheets” allowed us to generate specific performance characteristics arranged in levels.

The scatter chart above shows where each charity lies on both the donor experience and the design experience scale. We have removed three charities that were outliers in this chart with scores way above the average (Union Gospel Mission, Hope Mission, and The Gideons International). What we have left is what is known as the *pareto frontier*, which appears when there is a trade-off between two choices such as great design and great donor experience: charities with great design but little regard for donor experience and charities which emphasized donor experience but were poorly designed. In contrast, the five charities found at the outermost edge of the chart were found to be at the frontier of best-practices.

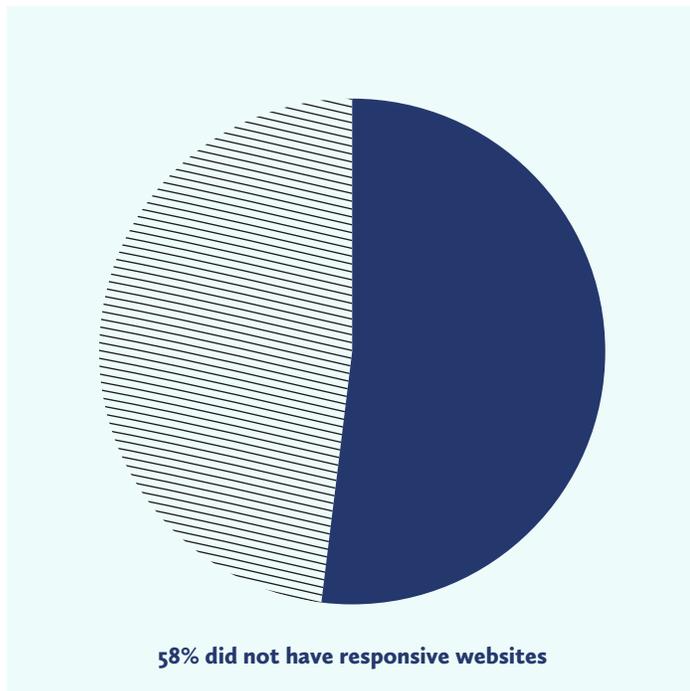
In this study, we excluded a handful of charities based on two main areas of focus: membership-based organizations and fee-based organizations. Congregations, places of worship and dioceses that seek to add new members as a primary mission on the web, fall into the former category. In the latter category are universities and camps whose primary mission on the web is to attract new students and campers over donors.

We used publicly-available Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) data to group the charities into six cohorts, primarily through total annual revenue, and more specifically the amount and percent of revenue from receipted donations.

# The donor's user experience when they are giving or are about to give

In this day and age, donors have myriad choices when it comes to deciding where to give their hard-earned dollars and where to place their long-term support. Besides donation boxes and direct-mail, websites are where donors go to make their decisions on who to give to, and how much to give. As the point of contact where donors are making critical giving decisions, online fundraising websites *must* be built around the user experience. In our research, we found four points of interest that stood out the most within the donor's experience. These points pertain to mobile responsiveness, transformative donor experiences, organizational credibility, and website design.

## 1. Mobile Responsiveness



The most striking finding of our study is that 53 of 92 charities did *not* have responsive websites, meaning that a small majority were *not* optimized for all sizes of devices (such as cell phones and tablets). Non-responsive websites mean that a mobile user would have a difficult time viewing and navigating most of the websites surveyed. This is at a time when 25% of internet users are reportedly surfing exclusively on their mobile devices. Take the figure below as

an example. The site on the left is optimized while the site on the right is not. There is a stark contrast in readability and usability. Imagine trying to enter financial information on one site versus the other.

**Now, if you are wondering why mobile responsiveness matters, consider these figures:**

- One Frontier client saw 78% of its online revenue growth for 2014 come from mobile devices.
- 200-400% mobile revenue growth is common among our client group

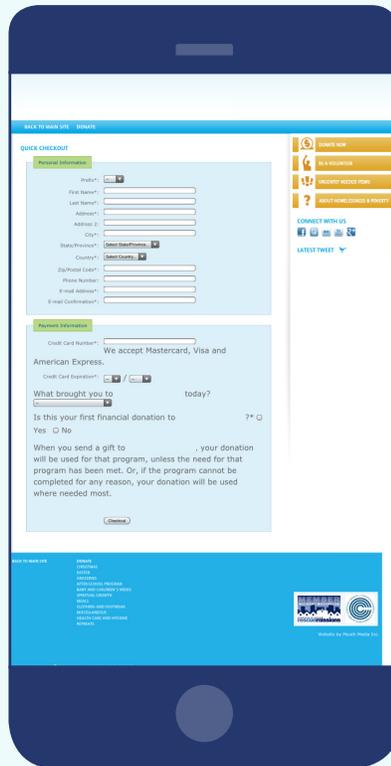
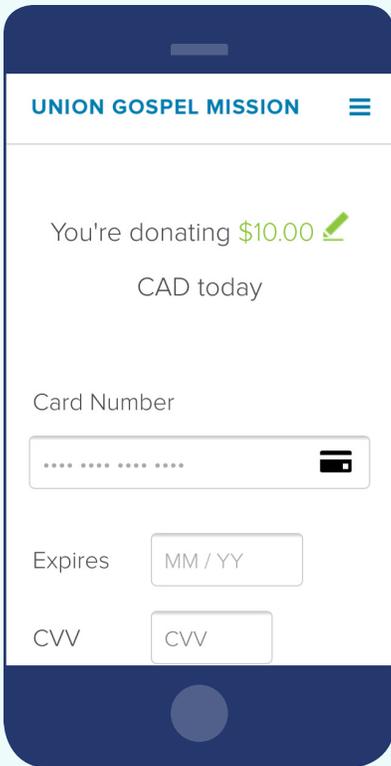
There are numerous reasons why mobile responsiveness is important. According to [npengage's study](#) of 343 non-profit websites, 9.5% of online giving came from mobile. When they looked at the top quarter charities with highest mobile to desktop gift ratio, the number increased to 17.8%. That's 1 in 6 donors who give on mobile - a number that cannot be ignored. Online traffic coming from iPhones and Android devices is skyrocketing. In fact, [npengage](#) reports that 25% of internet users solely use mobile.

A study by [Donor Drive on mobile responsiveness](#) reports that when a site is responsive, **giving on mobile devices doubles**. That's significant revenue that charities without responsive sites are missing. Driving this point home, beginning April 21 of this year, Google has expanded its use of responsiveness as a signal for page ranking. The more responsive a site is on mobile, the higher it will be ranked in search results on mobile. The future is here, and mobile responsiveness matters. Owen Williams of [thenextweb.com](#) says, "it should help motivate those sites that still don't have a mobile site to actually build one." Your charity's revenue depends on it.

**Responsiveness is generally judged by three things:**

- Text on a mobile site does not need to be pinched to be read.
- The size of the page is scaled down for ease of scrolling on mobile.
- Links are spaced to allow accurate selection.

The great news is, optimizing and maintaining your site



The site on the left is optimized while the site on the right is not. There is a stark contrast in readability and usability. Imagine trying to enter financial information on one site versus the other.

for mobile is not terribly hard. Here's how to improve your website for mobile giving:

- Use [Google's responsiveness test tool](#) to see where your charity's website stands.
- When making changes to your website, or hearing feedback from other staff, include your smartphone in the discussion. Timed, one-handed tests are one way to tell if you're doing it right, [according to designer Luke Wroblewski of lukew.com](#).
- Fast hosting of your website and smaller photos mean quicker load time. 16% of mobile users give up if pages take [too long to load](#).
- Break big tasks into smaller steps. Smaller forms allow the user to focus, and are a less intimidating experience. [Expectations impact conversion](#).
- Reduce the Number of Taps. The fewer taps to get to checkout, the more likely a user is to complete the donation process.

## 2. Transformational Experiences

If you are in the fundraising world or a donor yourself, you're probably familiar with the warm fuzzy feelings that people get when they give to a charitable cause. Also known as the 'giver's glow,' [neuroscience shows](#) that when people give to a cause they support, the brain is triggered to activate a pleasurable response, similar to that of satisfying

a food craving or learning that you hold a winning lottery ticket. This physiological response combined with the knowledge of the impact their donations have, make giving a transformative experience for donors. As the charity a donor has chosen to give to, one of the worst things you can do is ruin the giving experience by making it *transactional*.

### Some of the biggest offenders in bursting the bubble for donors are:

- Using the "add to cart" button for completing donations
- Asking donors to cover credit card or overhead fees
- Using a "submit" button as the final confirmation step

Be sure to use language that is well-suited to a charitable experience. 14 of the charities studied required us to "add to cart." Imagine the distaste you would feel as a donor who is supporting an anti child trafficking charity or sponsoring a child's education, for example when you have to click "add to cart" below the photo of the child. Surely that removes much of the heart-warming and humanizing emotions that made you want to give in the first place. Quite often, giving is very much an emotional decision. Don't ruin the emotive act of giving by using phrases suited more for ebay.com than your charity. If you are stuck using e-commerce technology, rephrase it to "add gift" as to not ruin the magic of giving.

Once at your checkout page, a donor has already agreed to

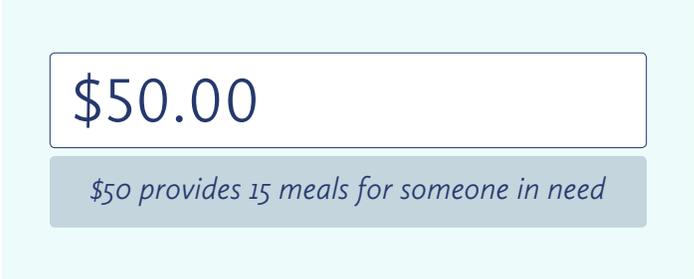
give you a specified amount. At the last steps of completing the donation, imagine if they are asked for an extra \$3 to cover the cost of overhead or to pay for credit card fees. Even in a transactional exchange, this would come off as cold and petty — imagine how this affects the donor’s giving experience. Our study found that 24 of the 92 Charities asked for money to pay for fees, often using a third-party tool like Canadahelps.org or Chimp.net to perform the transaction. While there is certainly a time and place to collect donations for overhead costs (like charity: water’s [‘The Well’](#)), the checkout page of a \$10 donation is not that place.

When all is said and done, and a donor is ready to send you their gift, pressing a “submit” button is a jarring and impersonal way to complete their participation. In the online world, one presses “submit” to complete an online tax return, not to donate to a charitable organization. Excellent alternatives include “Donate Now,” “Give Now,” or “Send Gift.”

An important thing to remember is that not everyone is a seasoned philanthropist. We often hear from charities about how difficult it is to find new donors, in spite of Canadians’ genuine desire to help support worthy causes. With the numerous charities out there working to end poverty, provide humane treatment to animals, improve our care for the environment, and promote gender equality, how would a donor know how much it costs to make a meaningful impact for each of these causes? One can rightly assume that your donors, especially first-time donors, aren’t experts in giving and need your assistance to determine an appropriate gift. [This study](#) found that suggested amounts encouraged more people to give. People also tended to give in the amounts asked. When done right, specific ask amounts increase even the [average gift size](#). Suggesting amounts sets a standard and encourages people to give perhaps a larger gift than when left to their own devices.



Not enough can be said about showing donors the impact that their contributions can make. The impact is one of the main reasons many choose to give, and continue to do so. Showing your donors where their dollars will go makes an incredible impression on donation amounts. Donors have been found to give up to [three times more](#) to charities that show the problem being solved and where their dollars will go. The offer you make to donors should be one they can’t refuse.



For example, if your offer is ‘\$3.29 provides a hot meal for someone in need’ - who would say “No, I’d rather not provide a meal for someone in need”? This simple offer describes the problem (hunger and poverty), and offers a solution that is within the donor’s reach to provide (\$3.29). Even so, our research revealed that 68% of the charities we studied gave no suggested amount or any explanation of how funds are used (e.g. for meals, community, etc). 45% made no attempt to describe how the donor’s gift would be spent (e.g. on administration, programs, or fundraising, etc.). This approach lacks donor accountability and can even hurt a charity’s credibility.

**3. Credibility**

In addition to being direct in describing the impact of a donation, showing donors exactly where all donation money goes is huge for establishing accountability and credibility. When a donor visits your website, they want to know that the organization they support or are considering supporting has all their documentation in order. Establishing this credibility comes from displaying trustmarks, establishing a privacy policy, and making financial documentation such as your annual and financial reports available. According to [a 2011 study](#), 74% of individuals indicated that they would like to view financial information prior to making a donation. In addition, 71% of foundations indicated that they’d look for financials as well prior to making a contribution. Including an ethical fundraising standards page that outlines how donor money will be spent is also important to show what your policies are when it comes to spending donor funds. If your donors do not feel that they can trust your





On the left are two organizations that do an incredible job of demonstrating impact on their donate pages: Saturday Place, and The Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.



organization, 90% of respondents in [this study](#) would stop giving to the charity altogether.

Despite these figures, our research revealed that basic standards of documentation on trust-building are not common. Donors want to know that their personal information will be safe when they donate. They want to be assured that the charity is registered and in good standing with the CRA. They want to know that the donations they give go to the cause they intended, and they want to see how the charity spends their fundraised dollars.

We noted that 20 of the 92 charities did not list their charity registration number on the website, and had no trustmark or proven affiliation of any kind. And, on the other end of the spectrum, only 20 *did* have their charity number, with security badge and other affiliations on the footer of each page. Only 53% of the charities had a privacy policy, 39% had an ethical standards page, 33% had financial reports and only 27% had an annual report online (issued within two years). Not only should you make this information available, you should make it easy to find. If a potential donor has difficulty locating the information they are looking for, they might just give up and leave without making a donation.

The good news is, all of this content is simple to produce in a basic form. If you're looking for best-in-show examples of documentation, take a look at [World Vision's privacy policy](#) and [Union Gospel Mission's Annual Report](#) (full disclosure, this is a Frontier project). We recommend having the

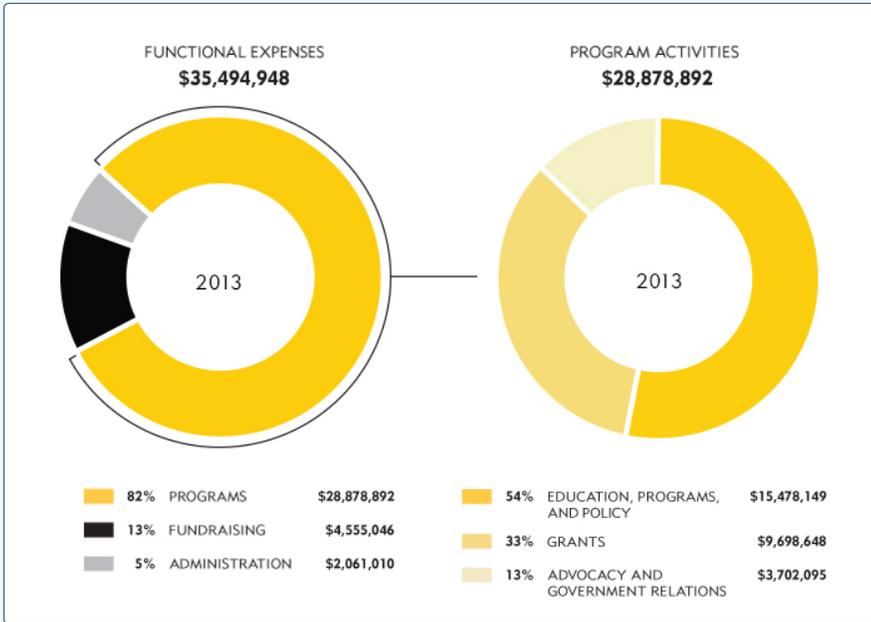
following documentation as a best practice for accountability and credibility:

- Your *latest* annual report
- Your latest *and* historical financial reports
- A privacy policy including reference to donors' information
- An ethical fundraising standards page

A good way to make sure your policies align with Canada's recommended standards is to refer to guidelines set by [Imagine Canada](#), [AFP](#), or [CCCC](#). A bonus way to make your documentation visually appealing and easily digestible is to visualize expenses and program activities.

#### 4. Design

Designing charity websites can be frustrating. Often organizations haven't created brand guidelines, not to mention their regular [over-reliance on amateur efforts](#) and [sub par tools](#). Further, it's often debatable which elements of a charity website are driven by science and which are driven by artistic choice. While we created a web design rubric to evaluate charities, and found many of them could use some artistic love, we found that a lot of them could use some clear scientific improvements that would lead to higher conversion. Design has the power to make or break a charity's donor experience. Good design has the ability to make giving an absolute breeze and an enjoyable process while bad design actually serves as a major barrier to giving. Design plays into



The Livestrong Foundation does a good job of visualizing expenses and program activities within their donation experience.

the donor experience from the moment they land on your page to the moment they receive a confirmation email once they've made their donation. From start to finish, design matters. Let's flush out how bad design can in fact make charities lose out on donations.

**The use of CAPTCHA**

CAPTCHA is the acronym for *Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart*, a technique used by a computer to tell if it is interacting with a human or another computer ([webopedia.com](http://webopedia.com)). CAPTCHA usually comes in the form of a blurred-out series of numbers and letters that only humans should be able to identify and enter into a field that validates your response. While CAPTCHA can be beneficial for certain kinds of ecommerce, adding this additional barrier to a donation form is not at all beneficial to charities. In our research, one charity did not receive a donation because our researcher could not complete their CAPTCHA despite over five attempts.

Keep in mind that most donors won't even try that many times. When someone is choosing to make a donation to your organization, don't make them jump through hoops to do so. We've said it before and we will say it again; donors seek a transformational experience, not a transactional one. Use payment providers like Stripe.com that enable [machine learning](#) to fight fraudulent transactions. Thankfully, only 4 of the 92 Charities had CAPTCHA on their donate forms.

**Distractions**

In design, less is more, in more ways than one. When it comes to donation landing pages and forms, the less distractions there are, the better, especially when someone has clicked on a donate button, either on your homepage, or

via an email link. Our scaling criteria included the following to reduce donor distraction:

- Under 20 ways to leave the donate page without making a donation,
- [13 or fewer fields on a checkout page](#) (excluding business and tribute fields)
- A simplified header and/or footer on the donate and checkout page
- A highly legible font on the donate form, built for screen applications (like Verdana, not Comic Sans)
- A donate link that is human and familiar, not `yourcharity.org/123abc.aspx` or a redirection to `Canadahelps.org`

While we do believe in giving credit where credit's due, it is not a necessity to credit your web designer in the footer. We see it all the time in footers: "*website design by NotRelevantToDonors.com.*" This simply provides another link for your donor to be redirected away from your page and away from making their donation.

If a donor gets lost and goes to the wrong page — known within the industry as a 404 error — use this failure as an opportunity to steward and redirect them to where you want them to go (like your donate page). An example of a wonderful 404 page can be found at [Chimp.net/404](http://Chimp.net/404).

**Keep it simple**

While a multi-step process is okay, as validated by the principle of [Progressive Disclosure](#), you also want to make the donation process as simple as possible. If you can help it, don't make your donors review and confirm in addition to filling up an entire form and hitting 'donate'. This can end in a loss of donation when a donor, once clicking

Here's an example from stjude.org of email validation that ensures good quality data:

St. Jude's Children's Hospital's "submit" button alternative:



'donate', thinks their donation is complete (and rightly so). Unfortunately, 40 of the 92 charities had a review or confirm step.

### How Good Design Can Help

From marketer Seth Godin's blog, [the first rule of web design](#) is: *tell me where to click*. This passage ending the blog post particularly stood out:

*"Get the language right first (and the colors). Tech isn't going to fix your problem, communication is."*

We want to make the donor experience the smoothest and easiest process possible. Good design creates an ease of giving while bad design creates a barrier to giving.

Take a look at the two pages on the next page: Note the placement and colours of the donate button. Far too often, it wasn't clear how to move from a charity's home page to their donate page. Note these two examples of Frontier-built websites that use a specific colour within the organization's brand palette for a donation-specific action and only use it there to avoid it blending in with the rest of the page. The placement is obvious and intuitive. Even at this size, isn't it obvious where you're supposed to click? **In order to put the desired action (to donate) front and centre, ensure the donate button is unique in colour compared to other buttons, and that it is placed in a prominent area (ideally above the fold of each page) across all pages.**

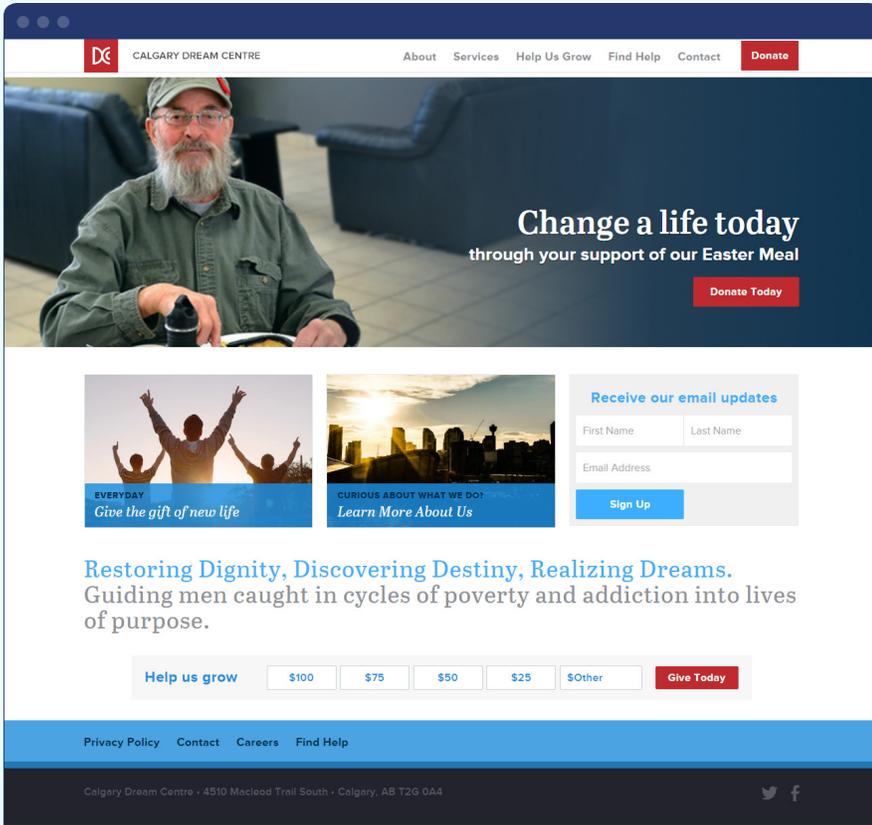
We also recommend having a donate field on every page so that as soon as a donor perusing your site makes the decision to give, the option is immediately there. To bring home the point of making the donor experience transformational

and not transactional, an excellent alternative to a "submit" button is a button that confirms the amount that you're giving, like St. Jude's Children's Hospital: (see example above)

Another huge plus for the donor experience is when charities use in-line validation to reduce errors and donation form abandonment. We have all had experiences of filling in a form, pressing "submit", only to find out that most of the information we entered was in the wrong format or our chosen username was taken. The task of re-submitting the form each time an error is found is incredibly frustrating for anyone - let alone in a form that is voluntary (donation forms).

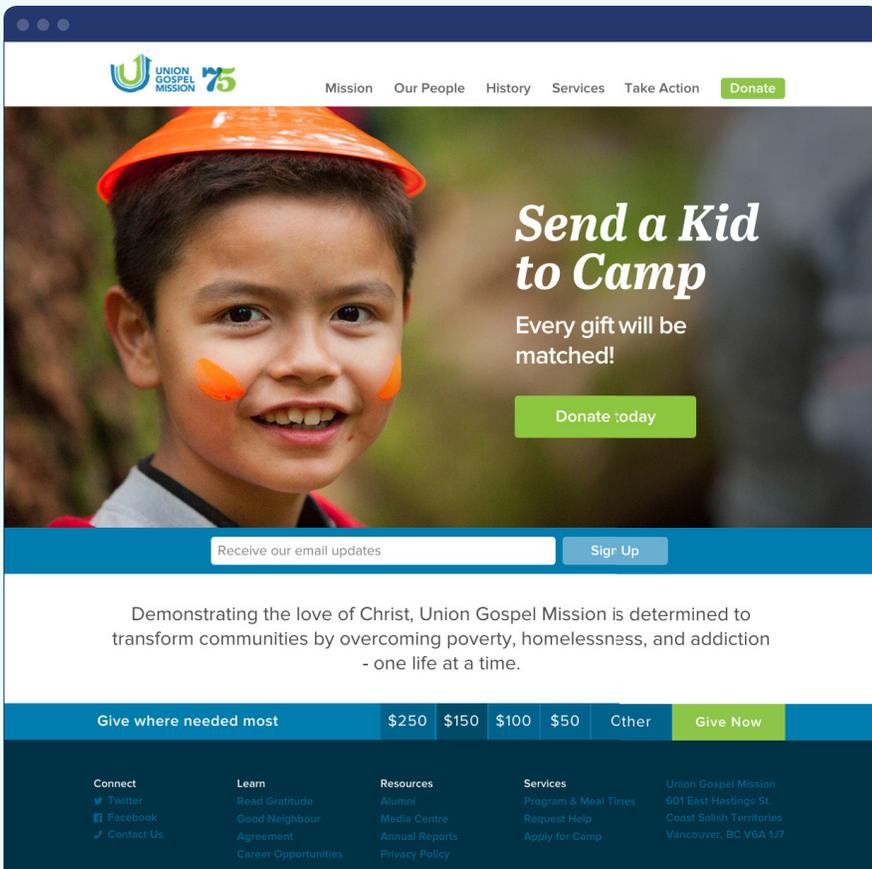
In-line validation is a great way to reduce this frustration and avoid dreaded [donation form abandonment](#). When an error is made on a form field, instruct the donor immediately and politely on how to improve their answer. Forms with [in-line validation](#) have these eye-popping results:

- A 22% increase in success rates
- A 22% decrease in errors made
- A 31% increase in satisfaction rating



Note the placement and colours of the donate button for both of these pages. Even at a distance it's obvious where the donor is intended to click.

Each page also has a secondary donate field above the footer. This secondary donate field appears on each page within the website, not including donate pages. This makes the option to give a specific amount readily accessible.



# The post-donation experience that increases donor loyalty

The deed is done. The donor has chosen to support your charity and has given you their money. All is good. However, the process is far from over. Beyond a tax receipt and the joy of giving, the donor is expecting nothing in return. The least we can do is ensure their giving experience is the transformative one they hope for by thanking them for their generosity, reminding them of their impact, and staying accountable to the donor. Not only does this foster positive donor relations, it also primes them for stewardship opportunities down the road.

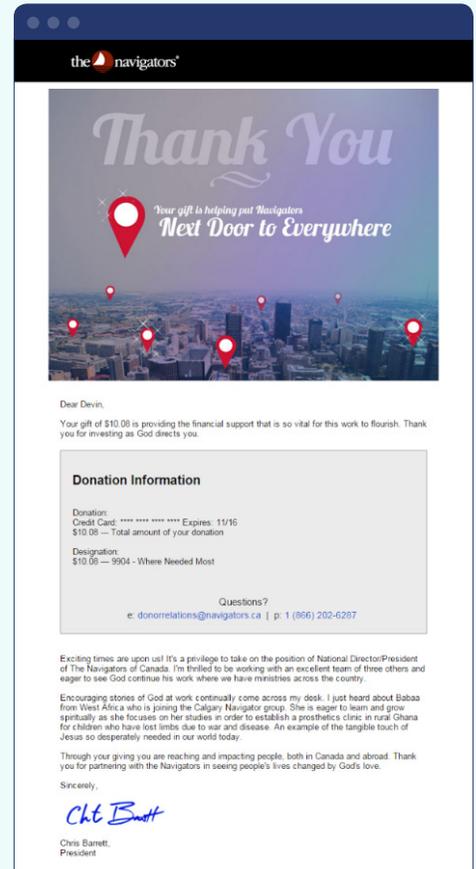
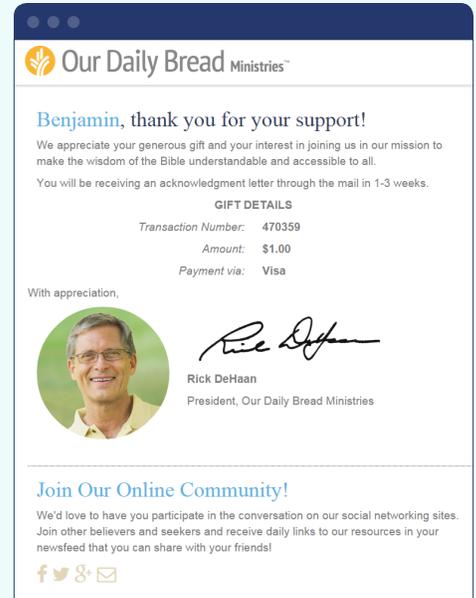
While saying 'thank you' to donors should be a given, it also matters *how* you say 'thank you'. Thank your donors directly, by name, from an individual human being and not a robot. This is also an opportunity to extend the donor's giving glow by suggesting next steps such as sharing the impact they just made on social media or reading the annual report. Only 23 of the charities in our study had a personalized message on the thank-you page and 37 of the charities had a thankful and human email response (non-transactional).

A great example of a thank you page came from [Daily Bread Ministries](#) which included the donor name, the gift amount, and next steps.

One big step in staying accountable to donors is one sometimes missed by charities: the email confirmation. Sadly, 11 of our donations didn't even receive a confirmation email. Without checking our credit card statement, how are we to know the donation worked? The email confirmation is another opportunity to thank the donor in writing with a personalized message. Using a donor's name brings a warm, human element to an otherwise automated process. A great way to tie their donation back to the cause they have just supported is to include a relevant photo that speaks to the impact they are making.

Additionally, keeping the donor informed about how they will be receipted (mail or email), and when to expect a receipt is important to avoid any uncertainty over the documentation of their donation.

Needing to confirm with donors that they've made a gift, and that it's valued, is important if not obvious, but perhaps the final frontier in email confirmations is the e-receipt. 35% of the charities studied provided a CRA-approved email receipt as their confirmation email (or in addition to it). Truly this is an example of completing the loop from the donor's initial attempt to help, to the satisfactory completion of the receipt. Do this well and donors of all types will feel well cared for.



Above: A great example of a thank you page from Daily Bread Ministries.

Below: Here is an example of a great thank you email that isn't our favourite design, but gets the job done right.

# Stewardship Opportunities that Lead to Higher Giving

Fundraising is ultimately about opportunity. As fundraisers, our bread and butter is creating opportunities and guiding donors to them. On digital mediums, there are always opportunities to do more and provide existing donors with options for higher giving.

As a baseline, you should always encourage and provide options for monthly giving. With monthly donors contributing [42% more](#) than one-time donors in a year, the stewardship of monthly donors is all the more pressing. If you can tell a compelling story about why monthly supporters are important to your cause, you're on your way! The option to give monthly should appear within the donation form, with suggested monthly amounts. Out of the charities surveyed, 25 provided the option somewhere on the donation page while only 9 had a 'Give Monthly' button at the top of the form with suggested amounts. As acquiring monthly donors is a priority for any charity, having a prominent monthly option is important. A technique we've seen success with is a branded monthly donor program that offers 'membership' to donors that makes them feel more engaged and invested than the one-time gifters. Both [charity:water](#) and [Pencils of Promise](#) are great examples of branded monthly donor programs.

Providing an option for legacy giving is a best practice that the World Wildlife Federation does, quite effectively [here](#). Our scoring revealed that only 38% of the charities surveyed provided the option for donors to leave a legacy. Ultimately, stewardship is about staying accountable and keeping your donors informed. Newsletters and annual reports are very effective in this regard, provided your donors have opted to stay in the loop.

# Using Google to your advantage

In this bonus section, we'd like to share with you some tips on how to best utilize Google for your fundraising needs. At Frontier, we make sure to take full advantage of Google as a tool.

[Google AdWords grants](#) are available to almost any not-for-profit organization. These are grants up to \$10,000 in online advertising credit that Google donates! These grants allow the organization to create text ads you see surrounding Google's search results. When someone types in your charity name (or a related keyword), your charity's ad will show up as the first option in a Google Search. This increases the likelihood of visits to your site, and shows you are on top of things. A Google AdWords grant account equips the user with \$120,000 per year in free spending, and allow for charities to be part of the future of marketing. Our research revealed that only 13 out of the 92 charities are utilizing Google Ads. All of our clients at Frontier are set up with a Google Grant, we suggest you get yours today!

Once your organization is set up with a Google Grant, the next step is to set up Google Analytics which allows charities to track their online giving revenue through the 'ECommerce' feature. Knowing where your revenue is coming from, and how much stems from online giving is important information to have, when it comes to understanding your online impact, and it allows you to create a well-informed online giving strategy for the future.

Optimizing your site is the last piece of the puzzle when it comes to effectively utilizing Google. Make sure your site is set up for search engine optimization and optimized for mobile browsing. When evaluating sites for search engine ranking, as of April 21, 2015 Google takes into account both your page's relevancy to the search and its mobile responsiveness (if the user is searching on mobile).

Beginning May 2015, Frontier is partnering with Google to help charities take better advantage of the services, free and paid, that Google offers. This collaboration allows for a sharing of best practices between the teams which translates to great news for charities. In the coming months we hope to be releasing more research on AdWords strategies specific to Canadian Charities.

# Summing it up

Your donor's online giving experience directly translates to their contributions, from deciding to give to your charity for the first time, to considering a longer-term partnership. This report has outlined why online giving matters, and the areas in need of most attention based on research of the 92 Canadian Christian charities. At Frontier, we've seen the whole gamut, from large charities increasing revenue over \$100,000 in a year to fledgling charities growing from nothing to five figures annually online. The web is the domain every charity can grow in and rely on for future program spending.

*At the end of the day, there are five principles we'd like charities to take away:*

- Mobile should be a top priority of 2015 for any website
- Giving online is an emotional experience that anyone can cultivate
- Ask specific amounts to get greater results
- Provide as much documentation as you can for the most particular donors
- Lead users on your website through colour, simplicity, and good design

We hope you have found this report to be informative and engaging, and that it inspires you to take your charity to the next level in online giving. This research project would not have been possible without the support of Charity Research and Development Foundation Canada, the [Bridgeway Foundation](#), and the Seacrest Foundation in partnering with us and funding this study.

# Digital Charity Rubric

The rubric below is a condensed sample of the list used to evaluate the digital fundraising experience in Canadian Christian Charities. Each field is focused on measuring a specific objective and is weighted differently according to the effect it has on the donor experience.

Best Practices	Out of	4	3	2	1	0	Your Org.
The Google ad for your charity should be ranked first in the search results, when searching the full name in private browsing mode.	3		Google ad comes up first in the list.	Google ad comes up.		No ad.	
“Donate” button is distinctly unique in colour to other buttons and colours.	2			Button is prominent and unique in colour.	Button is not unique in colour, or not prominent.	No donate button.	
“Donate” button should be prominent on all pages.	4	Button is prominent and unique in colour, and in-line with or above the navigation menu.	Button is prominent in colour and above the screen fold.	Button is at least consistent on all pages.	Button is only found on the homepage.	No donate link.	
A 404 page is ideally welcoming and helpful, and should enhance the user experience instead of frustrate, possibly even softly directing them to donate.	2			404 page has character and provides links to Donate page and Contact Us page, etc.	404 page includes instructions, but has no character.	Stock 404 page.	
Trustmark and/or Security Badge should be prominent (or affiliations such as CCCC)	2			Registered charity # can be seen, with the security software and other affiliations listed in the footer of each page.	Trustmarks etc. are located only on Home page or Donate page.	There are no visible trustmarks.	
Demonstrate impact clearly, with specific examples. For example, \$20 = 500 meals!	4	Suggested donations are provided with accurate descriptions of each gift’s impact.		Suggested donation buttons are provided with a corresponding general description of what the donor is potentially giving, along with an explanation of how donated funds are used. For example, it could be a meal, hope, community, etc.	A basic explanation about how funds are used is located on the Donate page.	No explanation is provided, about how funds are used.	
Provide a default donation amount, or suggest one or more amounts that donors could give.	4	Suggested donation buttons that auto-fill the form when clicked. These are on the same page as the donation form. They’re doing something slick.	There are suggested donation buttons, but they have no auto-fill on the form. Or, you’re taken to a different page, or there are only radio buttons at the top.	Suggested donation amount is provided, but there are no buttons.		There are no suggested amounts. A normal gift amount is a mystery.	

Best Practices	Out of	4	3	2	1	0	Your Org.
Create a simple donate form that does not discourage, frustrate, or overwhelm a potential donor. Donating should be as easy as possible. Excluding the business and tribute options, a regular donate form should have a maximum of 13 fields to fill out.	4	13 fields and under		14-19 fields		20+ fields	
The donate landing page should have an easily recognizable web address. For example, <a href="https://donate.charitywater.org/donate">https://donate.charitywater.org/donate</a> as opposed to a mess of code: <code>contribute/transact?reset=1&amp;id=3</code> .	1				Yes.	No.	
Headers and footers on donate landing page should be simple, so as not to distract a potential donor.	2			There are 2 or less buttons or links in the header. The footer is a simplified version.	There are 3 or more button or links in the header, and the footer is normal.	There is no difference between the page's header and footer.	
A donate landing page should have less than 20 ways to leave the page without making a donation.	2			There are fewer than 20 links or buttons on the Donate page.	There are 20 or more links, but there's a visible attempt to be simple.	There are no less distractions or options on the Donate page.	
City and province information should be automatically generated, based on address. This simplifies the user experience even further.	1				Generates address.	Does not generate address.	
Expiry date is in mm/yy format.	1				Yes.	No.	
Donors have the option of giving anonymously.	1				Yes.	No.	
Use in-line validation. For example, reminders such as, "Don't forget your postal code/province."	1				Affirms that donors complete fields correctly, as they go.	Does not use in-line validation.	
Ideally, email addresses that have been inputted incorrectly should be corrected automatically, or corrections should be suggested. For example, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital website.	1				Has a 'Did you mean' suggestion, or notices an incorrect email address.	Does not make corrections or suggested corrections.	

**Total**

**/35**

# About the study & fine print

The charities studied were selected through the Canadian Christian Charities list and grouped into cohorts based on data found on the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) website. We used this data to group the charities into six cohorts, primarily through total annual revenue, and more specifically the amount and percent of revenue from receipted donations.

## Cohort 1

World Vision Canada - Vision  
Mondiale Canada  
Samaritan's Purse - Canada

## Cohort 2

Power to Change Ministries  
Crossroads Christian Communications Inc.  
Union Gospel Mission (Vancouver)  
cbm Canada (christian blind mission)  
Focus on the Family (Canada) Assoc.  
Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada  
Wycliffe Bible Translators  
Canadian Bible Society  
The Yonge Street Mission  
The Scott Mission  
Hope Mission [AGRM only]  
The Gideons International In Canada  
Siloam Mission  
SIM Canada  
Young Life of Canada  
Welcome Hall Mission  
MSC Canada

## Cohort 3

ADRA Canada  
World Relief Canada  
Indwell  
Ray of Hope Inc.  
Bethesda Christian Association  
The Cridge Centre for the Family  
Christian Horizons (Canada)  
Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches

## Cohort 4

The Bible League of Canada  
Radio Bible Class (Canada) RBC Ministries

Billy Graham Evangelistic  
Association of Canada  
Mission Aviation Fellowship of Canada  
In Touch Ministries of Canada  
Navigators of Canada  
Operation Mobilization Canada  
International Teams of Canada  
SEND International of Canada Inc.  
Trans World Radio Canada  
The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada  
The Good News Broadcasting  
Association of Canada  
Insight for Living Ministries Canada  
Avant Ministries Canada  
Open Doors with Brother Andrew, Inc.  
Souls Harbour Rescue Mission (AGRM only)  
Union Gospel Mission (Winnipeg)  
Square One World Media Inc.  
Intercede International  
Kelowna Gospel Mission Society  
Alpha Ministries Canada  
Seeds of Hope Children's Ministry  
Every Home for Christ International / Canada  
Promise Keepers Canada  
Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada

## Cohort 5

Mercy Ministries of Canada  
Chosen People Ministries (Canada)  
Calgary Pregnancy Care Centre Association  
Kids Alive International - Canada  
Ravi Zacharias International Ministries  
Canada  
ABWE Canada  
Hockey Ministries International  
ISMC International Student Ministries  
Canada  
Galcom International Inc

Montreal Youth for Christ  
SCA International  
Vision Ministries Canada  
Toronto City Mission  
Awana International Canada  
InterAct Ministries of Canada

## Cohort 6

Creation Ministries International (Canada)  
Jews for Jesus  
LAMP Ministry  
Into All The World Inc.  
Salaam Ministries  
Child Evangelism Fellowship of Canada  
Teen Mania - Canada  
Threshold Ministries  
Christian Hit Radio Inc. (CHRI-FM)  
Scripture Union  
Lighthouse Harbour Ministries  
Precept Ministries Inc.  
SGM Canada  
Crossroads Clinic Association  
The Valley Care Pregnancy Centre  
Intertribal Christian Communication  
(Canada) Inc  
Living Hope Native Ministries  
London Crisis Pregnancy Centre  
Canadian Association of Pregnancy  
Support Services  
K-W Pregnancy Resource Centre  
JFJ Hope Centre (mission)  
Missions Festival (MISSIONS FEST) Society  
World Mission to the Deaf  
Key Life Network of Canada Inc.  
Fellowship of Faith for the Muslims

## Average Scores by CRA Cohort

Number Of Charities	Cohort	Donor Experience Score	Design Score	Total
2	1	42	50	92
17	2	39	45	84
8	3	33	40	74
25	4	33	42	75
15	5	29	41	70
25	6	26	38	64
92	ALL	32	41	73

### Below is a brief overview of the top two tiers of CRA cohorts:

#### *Cohort 1: Charities in a League of Their Own*

1. World Vision Canada
2. Samaritan's Purse - Canada

**Areas of emphasis:** Social services and disaster/war relief (2).

**Financials:** \$21-260M received donations, \$1.7-55.4M fundraising expenditure. \$60-390 total revenue.

**Location:** Ontario (1) Alberta (1)

**Registered:** 1=1967\*

*Notes: Both organizations fall under the same category and have international peers.*

#### *Cohort 2: Top Tier, Donor Driven Charities*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Power to Change Ministries                   | 9. The Yonge Street Mission             |
| 2. Crossroads Christian Communications Inc.     | 10. The Scott Mission                   |
| 3. Union Gospel Mission (Vancouver)             | 11. Hope Mission [AGRM only]            |
| 4. cbm Canada (christian blind mission)         | 12. The Gideons International In Canada |
| 5. Focus on the Family (Canada) Assoc.          | 13. Siloam Mission                      |
| 6. Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada | 14. SIM Canada                          |
| 7. Wycliffe Bible Translators                   | 15. Young Life of Canada                |
| 8. Canadian Bible Society                       |   |

**Areas of emphasis:** missionary organizations, evangelism (7), religious publishing (3) medical services (1) Food or clothing banks, soup kitchens, hostels (6)

**Financials:** Received donations up under 22 M and over \$5M, Overall revenue under \$60M

**Location:** BC (3) ON (9)

**Registered:** 10 = 1967\* 2 = 1970s 3 = 1980s